

A History of Bexhill Sailing Club

The first 50 years

K A Hancock



*It is in celebration of the past and in the
spirit of hope for the future that this book
has been produced to record the first
50 years history of the Bexhill Sailing Club.*

A History of Bexhill Sailing Club

The first 50 years

K A Hancock

Acknowledgments

I WOULD like to thank the many people who have helped me in various ways to produce this book.

For the generous support of the National Westminster Bank.

To the Bexhill Observer from which so much information has been extracted to form the basis of many articles and the reproduction of several photographs. A special thank you to the late Laurie Webber for his cheerful and often colourful reportage of the Sailing Club's activities. Also to the Public Library for allowing me the facilities to research the old copies of the Bexhill Observer.

My thanks to Marion Longley for allowing me to use the log of Derry's and Mike Macey's cruise to France. Also to Pauline Dearing for similarly helping with Geoff Larkby's cruise across the Channel.

Thank you Dini Adams for your help in collating the article on Mike's achievements. To Ray Dixon for his work on sail training. To David Stedman for the article on watches. To Craig Baber for his drawings. To Brian Mewett for the photographs used. To Sandra Bournes for the quantity of midnight oil burned in typing manuscripts.

Last but by no means least to Meridian PR for the considerable help and advice in the layout and production of this book. Nick Margerum's expertise and free use of his time, a commodity in very short supply, is beyond value. Without his unique input this book would not have been possible.

K A Hancock



Foreword

by J B Baber

THIS comprehensive yet compact history of the Bexhill Sailing Club guides the reader through the first 50 years of it's history.

I have been fortunate enough to have had the pleasure of knowing most of the people mentioned during this period and over the years have formed firm friendships with a large number of them. It's the call of the sea that gives us a common bond.

The Club was formed to foster the love of the sea, to practice seamanship and extend goodwill to all those who enjoy 'messing about in boats' and to this end the Club has been most successful.

Many of the photographs in this book are taken from club members, past and present, personal collections and I'm sure you will agree, they greatly add to the pleasure of reading this book.



No person has done more than Hugh Maynard to help me produce this book. The idea first surfaced several years ago and we both started producing tentative contributions. Hugh is the only active founder member who has served the club continuously since that very first day right up to the present. Some of the posts he has held are listed at the back of this book under 'List of Officers.'

Hugh's knowledge and recollections of the beginning of the Club are invaluable especially as, until now, much of his memories have not been committed to print and could, so easily, have been lost forever in the mists of time. He has helped me unstintingly whenever asked and put me right on many points of detail.

Hugh is the second of four generations of the Maynard family to have been associated with Bexhill Sailing Club and I cannot stress enough how grateful I am to him for all his help and dedication.

K A Hancock

Contents

2	<i>In the begining</i>
7	<i>Bexhill Inshore Tankard</i>
8	<i>Early days</i>
18	<i>Olympic medalist opens new Clubhouse</i>
19	<i>Regatta and Sea Week</i>
22	<i>Dinners and Dances</i>
23	<i>Bexhill Marina?</i>
24	<i>History of the Classes</i>
27	<i>RAF Wartling</i>
28	<i>Buoys</i>
30	<i>Team racing</i>
31	<i>A dream come true</i>
32	<i>Our rescue boats</i>
34	<i>Oil</i>
35	<i>Communications</i>
36	<i>The Clubhouse under attack!</i>
37	<i>Fundraising</i>
38	<i>The Royal Sovereign</i>
40	<i>The Beach Site</i>
41	<i>Maintenance of the clubhouse</i>
42	<i>The Carousel</i>
42	<i>'Evening Gold'</i>
44	<i>Sail Training</i>
49	<i>The Watch System</i>
49	<i>East Sussex Coastal Sailing Federation</i>
50	<i>Storm Force</i>
52	<i>Championships...</i>
53	<i>...and Champions</i>
58	<i>As the years roll by</i>
58	<i>Naval traditions</i>
59	<i>Epic voyages</i>
60	<i>From Bexhill to France in a Fuss and no bother</i>
68	<i>The cruise of the Zoom</i>
70	<i>Across the Channel in a Firefly</i>
73	<i>The Ash adventure</i>
74	<i>List of Officers</i>

In the beginning...



The Kursaal, early 20th century, stood on the site now occupied by the Bexhill Sailing Club. Note the War Memorial that is still standing outside the club to this day.

THE earliest reference to any organisation of sailing in the town was a sailing section of the Marine Club which became the Kursaal Club in June 1905, this closed in 1908.

Every year before the 1939/45 war, during the late summer (weather permitting), Bexhill on Sea held its Annual Rowing Regatta on the south side of the De La Warr Pavilion Colonnade which was the headquarters of the Regatta Committee and the start and finish line.

A number of Bexhill people owned a variety of sailing boats and it was the custom for one race to be held for them during the afternoon. Also, apart from the rowing races, racing was held for motor boats and canoes. An arbitrary handicapping system was used and boats were put into categories according to their observed performances. The organisation of the sailing races was in the hands of Jack Maynard, who was an early sailing enthusiast with Dr Ronnie Andrews and a few others. Dr Ronnie Andrews and

his wife, Rosemary, came to live in Bexhill in 1937 and he brought with him his 9ft clinker double-ended sailing dinghy *Tern*.

The regattas were suspended during the war when, after the fall of France in 1940, Bexhill became a restricted area having been until then a reception area for evacuated children from the Lewisham area of London, and also expectant mothers. The beach was inaccessible and 'off limits' with barbed wire entanglements, tank traps and gun emplacements

etc. except for a small area set aside for the fishermen. This was how things remained until the liberation of France and the eventual winning of the war in Europe.

Jack Maynard rented a plot of land to the west of Veness Gap where he had a beach hut with beach immediately to the south of the cliff face and he had a wire cable hand winch. It was at Veness Gap, pre war, that some of the sailing fraternity gathered together to enjoy their sport. Further East, where

1947

*Racing Rule Number 1,
Blackleading below the waterline is
not allowed.*

the Sovereign Cafe now stands, lay several professional motor fishing craft similar to those at Hastings but smaller. Of amateur sailors there were few. Jack purchased the land during the war period and it was to be his 21st birthday present to his son, Hugh. Thus, upon demobilisation, Hugh and his friends together with Jack and his friends found that the small group of enthusiasts had grown from pre war days and anything up to twelve dinghies of various designs assembled together.

Thus was formed the 'Veness Gap Yacht Club' mainly for the purpose of sailing and drinking beer (not necessarily in that order) and with no discernible rules. Among many of those members were Johnny Baber, Derry Longley, Roy and Don Harrison, Jimmy Shearing, Eric Gordon, Ken Hancock, Mike Knox-Wilson, Stanley Balson and their respective wives, girlfriends, sisters etc.

At the end of the Summer Season of 1946, moves were afoot to start a 'proper sailing club' with a Constitution, membership fees, headquarters and the like. Captain F.C. Crosse RNR, the father of Ruth(Powell), Betty, John and Lovell, together with Bernard Noakes, Dr Andrews, Col. Charles and others met at Jack Maynard's office at 1 Collington Avenue to explore the possibility of



Preparing to launch from Veness Gap.

forming a sailing club. After a number of exploratory meetings a firm proposal evolved.

The Editorial in the Bexhill Observer of 22nd February 1947 in the Town Talk column stated:- "Up to the present Bexhill has not had a sailing club. Its value as a Town attraction needs no emphasis and I am told that there are good prospects of one being formed. Over 60 people



Fancy Dress cricket match at Veness Gap 1948.

have expressed their interest in the proposal and a meeting to carry the matter forward will be held in the Devonshire Hotel next Wednesday. In addition to encouraging the sport locally, the objects of the club will be to make it possible for members who do not possess a boat of their own to get sailing in club boats, cheaply, to organise races at weekends and on regatta days; to arrange beach facilities for launching and coming ashore and to provide a headquarters and storage accommodation for members' gear."

On Wednesday 19th March 1947 at a meeting held in the Lecture Hall of the De La Warr Pavilion the Constitution of the newly inaugurated Bexhill Sailing Club was discussed and approved. Mr Bernard Noakes the club organiser and Hon Secretary of the interim Committee presided. The main business of the meeting was to approve the club rules and elect the club Officers and General Committee for the coming year. The following Officers were elected.

President Charles Gulliver. Dr Ronnie Andrews was invited to be the first Commodore but lack of available time prevented him accepting. However he was able to persuade Captain F.C. Crosse to stand and he was elected. Hon Treasurer was Major F.G. Sherrington. Hon Secretary was Mr John Evans (Later John Evans retired and Dr P.W.L. Andrew took over as Hon Secretary).

A General Committee of nine members comprising five sailing members, one lady member and three motor boat owners under the chairmanship of Bernard Noakes was elected.

Because of the obvious lack of funds it was not possible at that time to have a headquarters building, so Mr Russell (of Russells Garage in London Road) volunteered the use of his beach hut which was then situated on the North side of West Parade approximately opposite the (now) Sovereign Light Cafe. The beach site was also the base of local fishermen and a well known longshoreman, one Joe Valenti, who was very enthusiastic in his assistance to the sailors. Joe was

the proud owner of a power winch used for pulling the very considerable weight of Mr Russell's 16ft inboard engined fishing boat and trailer. The wheels of this trailer were huge in diameter and had steel 'tyres' about 18 inches wide.

At about this time, Bernard Noakes, who employed Eddie Edwards, a very experienced and excellent boat builder who hailed from Devon, decided to build a few newly designed Merlin Rockets to start the first class boat in Bexhill. Eddie's workshop was in Windsor Road. Early takers were Dr Ronnie Andrews who bought Number 147 for £120, Dr Sam Parsons, Jack Hall and Don Cooke.

The Club burgee to a design by Mike Knox-Wilson was adopted.

This is based upon the Battle of Hastings 1066 and the arrow that lodged in King Harold's eye. It is in gold on a royal blue background.

But what of the Veness Gap Yacht Club? Because of beach space restrictions, the fleet at Veness Gap decided to remain there for the

time being and it was the custom for the entire fleet to sail down to the Bexhill Sailing Club site, race and then return back to base. This split between the two fleets did not lend itself to good club spirit and later, when better accommodation both on the beach and under cover was made available, the majority of the Gap boats moved to join the others. For the first two seasons, racing was organised from Joe Valenti's site with a temporary mast and crosstrees being strapped to the promenade railings. Various kinds of marks were used and generally they were of the type used by local fishermen, i.e. a cork float base, a thin bamboo pole and a coloured flag on top. After the weekly race, Mr Russell allowed us to make tea in his beach hut and we sat on the grass bank alongside.

The newly formed Bexhill Sailing Club opened the season at Whitsun with trial racing for future handicapping purposes and already membership was about 50.

A few weeks later, Page 1 of the Bexhill Observer



carried the following headline “SEA RESCUE THRILL FOR HOLIDAY CROWDS” – Hundreds of holiday makers witnessed a dramatic sea rescue off the West beach last Saturday afternoon when a small yacht belonging to Bexhill Sailing Club and carrying two of the Club members capsized. The incident took place two miles out to sea. The occupants of the boat, a 14ft sailing craft, were Mr J.W. Edwards and Mr M. Knox-Wilson, and their craft was being tested for its seaworthiness in the comparatively rough sea which was running at the time when it capsized throwing both occupants into the water. Both Mr Edwards and Mr Wilson are fairly strong swimmers and for some time they swam around the overturned craft which fortunately remained buoyant until they found a suitable part of it on which to hold. They had been in the water for over half an hour when a rescue launch took them on board and towed their craft to the beach. The incident was first noticed by a party of holiday makers who had watched the craft leave the beach for its trial run.

They raised the alarm and the rescue launch from

the Sailing Club put out from the beach. Neither of the men was any the worse for his experience and both were smiling broadly as they stepped ashore near the Clock Tower on the West Parade. Mr Edwards told an Observer reporter “It all happened so quickly, we were running before the wind when, suddenly, the craft *Victoria* was caught in the squall and capsized. My companion and I soon managed

to get a secure handhold on the boat and we remained clinging to the craft until help arrived. Our two fears were that we might be drifting out to sea and that our mishap had not been noticed by people on the beach. While in the water, I took bearings from two landmarks and we

were more than relieved to find we were drifting towards the beach. Moreover, our fears regarding the possibility of the spill not having been seen from the beach were also unfounded for a launch soon came to our rescue and took us on board. What I want to stress is that we were testing the craft and we were not out for a joyride. The great point is that we now know the capabilities of the craft although it cost us a wetting to do so”

In 1947, that was a news story worthy of $\frac{3}{4}$ inch

1949

In the late summer a film crew descended on Bexhill to make the film 'all on a Summer's Day' starring Kathleen Harrison and Peter Lorre. Some shots had to be retaken because of sailing boats intruding into the scenes!



Early Club members (1948). Who do you recognise 50 years on?

headlines and a front page splash. Nowadays it would not even warrant a mention!

The first Club race proper was held on Saturday 7th June 1947.

The Club's second AGM was held in the Devonshire Hotel on 10th January 1948 and the Commodore, Capt F.C. Crosse reported that at the start of last season the Club had only half a dozen craft, but at the conclusion twenty six were taking part in weekend racing. He said that it was hoped difficulties that were being experienced through lack of headquarters would be cleared up during the coming season as Mr Ravenshear's estate office on the West Parade would be made habitable and it was hoped to build changing rooms underneath (unfortunately this scheme did not materialise). The social side of Club activities had not been neglected. Among other events we held 4 Dinners

and 2 Dances annually. A House Committee of four Ladies and four Gentlemen was constituted to look after this side of things. There would be semi-permanent buoys ones that could be properly seen ! There was talk of low tide racing and it was agreed this was possible but that it would be hard work.

Mr Noakes hoped to have a trolley ready to transport boats over the sand. On the question of rescue boats, last year's boats were not sufficiently safe or speedy enough and it was asked whether a contract could be entered into for the provision of a safety boat for this season. Thought should be

given to the use of spinnakers this year. It was agreed to increase the General Committee from 9 to 12 and it should include at least one lady member and one motor boat owner. We had, by this time, formed a Sailing Committee.

The Club was in the news again on 29th May

1949

Just before the Club's move to Channel View East side, Bernard Noakes left Bexhill. It was he, more than anyone else, who had helped found the Club and had done so much to put Bexhill on the map. He was appointed the Club's first Honorary Member



Bexhill Sailing Club's first headquarters (1948) – a hut on West Parade.

1948 with front page headlines in the Bexhill Observer "FOUR YACHTS CAPSIZE" "Thrilling rescues from the sea were witnessed by many people who were on the West Parade on Sunday morning. Crowding the rails between the Clock Tower and Brockley Road they watched yachting enthusiasts of Bexhill Sailing Club launch their craft for the first race of the season – already postponed for a week and within a short while four of them capsized throwing their occupants, one of whom was a girl, into the sea. Rescue boats lost no time in putting out to their aid. The water was cold and the waves were running fairly high but thanks to prompt action none of the shipwrecked suffered anything worse than a thorough wetting, though when they landed, their teeth were chattering. Hot coffee was brought down to the beach in a vacuum flask by Mr J. Bonham from the nearby Arundel Hotel. Those rescued were Peter Bowles, Hugh Maynard, John Baber, Mr Edwards, Mr Francis, Mrs Rosemary Andrews and Miss Violet Jay"

The Club still desperately needed their own headquarters and after much burning of midnight oil and innumerable committee meetings it was

decided to purchase a cabin about 15ft x 6 ft and this was erected with Council permission on a platform on stilts on the beach roughly where the Sovereign Cafe stands today. To one side was a starters box, this being a small converted beach hut on the sea side of which was erected the signalling mast and a gun platform. The cabin was designed to meet several needs of the Club. In addition to providing a temporary headquarters and a meeting place it housed an electrically operated winch which eased the strain of hauling boats up the beach. In the cabin there were facilities for storage of Club gear and for making tea on a primus stove. There were no toilet facilities and we either had to go for a prolonged

paddle in the sea or walk to the end of the West Parade to the toilets there. There were no changing facilities either and it might be thought that life was hard in those days when we see the facilities provided in our present excellent Clubhouse.

However, the Club, inaugurated only a year ago, was successfully overcoming its teething troubles and there were now 130 members and 44 craft.

1953

Pevensey Bay had just joined Eastbourne, Artisans, Bexhill, Hastings and Rye as a centre for sailing. Artisans were later to become known as Sovereign Sailing Club and they operated independently from Eastbourne Sailing Club. In 1993 Sovereign and Eastbourne merged to become Eastbourne Sovereign Sailing Club, mainly through financial pressures.

Bexhill Inshore Tankard

EASTBOURNE had the Royal Sovereign Race, Pevensey Bay had the Martello Race.

Bexhill thought it was about time we had our own Open Long Distance Race. So the first Bexhill Inshore Tankard Race was held in 1955. The course was Bexhill to Normans Bay and back, and 17 boats entered the first race with a National 12 from Eastbourne winning.

After that first year the course was changed. Starting at the Club to a buoy at Cooden Beach, back inshore to the Club buoy and then to a buoy at Galley Hill and return to the Club buoy, a distance of about 14 miles. This could be in either direction according to the wind, and of one or two laps. The course could be shortened to half a lap if necessary.

The buoy at Cooden Beach was laid on the sand at low water and similarly the one at Galley Hill. However in 1962 it was decided that the East buoy should not be laid East of the Sackville in view of sewage problems at Galley Hill. This was, of course, before the long sea outfall pipe had been laid.

Craft which won the race were the 12ft National, 14ft Dinghy, Albacore, Merlin Rocket, Osprey and Swift Catamaran. The race had mixed fortunes, the highlight being in 1961 when 12 different Clubs competed with a total of 67 boats.

This was never an easy race to monitor and the rescue boats were usually kept at full stretch. After 1967 it was decided to discontinue the race.

Early days...

...as the club expands permanent headquarters become the goal

THE growing needs of the Club meant that the Committee were on the look out for better beach facilities and a more permanent headquarters. Negotiations had been going on with the Bexhill Borough Council and they were most cooperative and sympathetic to our needs. The outcome of these deliberations was reported to members at the AGM held in the Devonshire Hotel in March 1949, by the Honorary Secretary Mr Steve Duckett. "The days have gone when to be a member of Bexhill Sailing Club was to be looked on with amusement. Today it is a privilege and tomorrow it will be an honour" he said. "It had become obvious last season that the open beach site on the West Parade provided insufficient facilities for the growing needs of the Club."

The Club had been informed that the Council had adopted a recommendation of the Estates and Parks Committee that a site extending 180 feet Eastwards from the steps leading to the beach South of the War Memorial be allocated as a site for private pleasure sailing boats subject to the payment of appropriate fees. It also agreed to the use of two rooms at Channel View East, now occupied by Bexhill Rowing Social Club, on a rental basis plus

Rates. Restoration would have to be carried out to the South Room (it was used by the Army during the war) but it was hoped to finish this by the end of March so that tenancy could commence on 1st April.

Mr Duckett went on "To get the best out of this opportunity there must be responsibility. We are, as it were, on trial before the Council and Public and if need be, we must curb our impetuosity so that we do nothing that will jeopardise for all time the prospects of the Club.

The beach site was not to be reserved exclusively for the Club but for sailing boats. In practise, however, the Club would not be able to escape the major responsibility for

the appearance of the site and its tidiness. The Committee feel that the good name of the Club is all important."

As a matter of interest, the building was part of a proposed development, pre first world war, for a swimming pool within the rectangle of buildings now forming Channel View, the Amusement Arcade, the Albatross Club etc. The Sailing Club premises formed what was to be the main entrance to the pool, the entrance hall being the public access to the ticket office. The original steps to gain access

1950

Captain Crosse stood down as Commodore and was appointed the Club's first Vice President.



The yacht *Skyllark* on the beach, just to the east of the Kursaal, c1910.



Museum Curator Mr Sargent records the daily sunshine total from the device on the roof of the new headquarters.

to the swimming pool are there to this day. The pool area can easily be seen by walking along the alleyways to the rear of the Toilets. It is not clear why the development did not proceed but probably it was the fault of the post war depression. It is also interesting to note that the beach site being taken over was used pre-war (1914/18) by a large yacht named *Skylark*, owned by Charlie Gold, which he used for pleasure trips. Where the cafe is now at the north east corner of this block was the site of the Public Library before it moved to its present position in the old school building at the corner of Western and Sackville Road.

On the roof of our new headquarters there was a sunshine-measuring apparatus, and Mr Sargent, the Museum Curator, used to make his daily ascent of the wooden steps to take the readings.

Work was immediately put in hand and the first job was the dismantling of the brickwork fortifications. One room was handed over by the end of April, soon to be followed by the other and then it was up to members to fit the rooms out and furnish them. Most of the furniture, carpets and curtains were provided by members. The South room was the Lounge and Bar, the North room the Galley.

The never to be forgotten basements under each room were to be used as changing rooms and general storage. What we did not realise was that the basements were at or below high water level at spring tides and it was not uncommon for everything to be awash. Drying facilities were necessarily rather difficult. We even had Fitting Out and Laying Up Suppers down there and it was all very good fun.

Arrangements were made to move the Starters Hut to the new site approximately where the present Club is sited now and boats moved on to the new site. Things began to take on a more orderly shape. We had a powered winch installed which was supplied by Mr Russell and driven by a Morris car engine complete with brass radiator. The engine was a powerful brute and was geared to the large winch unit, part of which is our present electric powered winch. John Brockhurst, although not then a Club member, was the Engineer who installed the engine. A large pulley block was attached to the promenade wall just to the East of the Ramp and the cable was then run down to the water's edge.

The big day for the opening of the new headquarters was reported in the lead story of the



Boats first, take up position on the site of the present club house.



The starters' hut was relocated on the site of the present Clubhouse.

Bexhill Observer on Saturday 2nd July 1949 as follows:-

"As if to ensure the event was well and truly launched every single one of the thirty odd craft in the Club augmented by a dozen boats from Eastbourne and Artisans Sailing Clubs put to sea in perfect weather for one of the greatest musters of sailing craft seen off Bexhill – probably ever.

Hundreds of holiday makers thronged the East Parade and the beach around the Sailing Club site well before the appointed time for the commencement of the afternoon events to watch the activities of the helmsmen and crews preparing their craft before putting to sea. The opening ceremony was performed by the Mayor, Alderman C. Pyecroft accompanied by the Mayoress. Others present included the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Green and Mrs Green, Alderman Bowrey Chairman of the Borough Entertainments Committee, the Town Clerk Mr Edward Smith, representatives of other sporting and commercial organisations in the Town and Club Officials. The Sea Rangers formed a Guard of Honour.

The Mayor asked the Commodore, Capt F.C.

Crosse to accept a pennant to be known as the Mayoress's Pennant as a trophy to be raced for annually. This is of blue silk velvet and gold thread in the Club colours and it bears the Borough Coat of Arms. The Mayoral party was conducted over the new headquarters and the Mayor was the first person to sign the Visitors' book. The HQ contains a Lounge furnished mainly by members and a canteen complete with counter in a cream and green colour scheme. There are changing rooms in the basement where the sail and general store is situated.

The Mayor and his party inspected the thirty sailing dinghies lined up on the shore and then proceeded to the Starters Cabin on the beach

site where he met the Flag Officers, inspected the Sea Rangers and fired the first gun to start the race."

1950 was a period of consolidation and continued steady expansion. We had regular exchange visits with Eastbourne and Rye Sailing Clubs, both sailing and social, which helped to promote the feeling of inter-club fellowship. Also on the programme were a series of relay races which it was hoped would encourage the spirit of team effort. Some days were set aside for cruises

1952

The post of Rear Commodore was created and Mr (Jimmy) J.G.D. Shearing was the first to take that position

as well. It was not all serious racing.

Until now half of the yachts were at one end of the Town and half at the other. It was now that the Veness Gap contingent decided to move to the Club site.

There was correspondence in the local paper complaining that since the Club moved from the West Parade the only attraction left were the donkeys!

Dry Rot was discovered in our headquarters building but the problem as to whose responsibility it was was settled by a sympathetic Council.

Membership stood at 177.

Dr Beeching had been busy with his railway cuts, a casualty of which was the Bexhill West to Crowhurst line, a much loved push and pull 2-carriage steam train popular with the daily commuters to the City. We acquired a good number of railway sleepers which we dug into the beach and used to make life easier in moving the rescue boat. We still have some to this day.

The annual subscription was reduced and the entrance fee abolished. The Laying Up and Fitting Out Dinners were abandoned in favour of less formal functions.



The Mayor, Alderman C Pyecroft and Commodore Captain F C Crosse at the opening ceremony of the Club's second headquarters.



A starting cannon was bought to replace the shotgun we used and which Dr Parsons said was a menace to people on the beach – and the person who fired it!

Mr Hyde, one of our official time-keepers, made the moveable beach transit mark which is still in use today.

The Club made application to Hastings Council to use the Darwell Reservoir at Robertsbridge for winter sailing from October to April. We were supported by the RYA who said that Bexhill SC was recognised by them and was known to be a most reputable and well organised club. Further support came from our MP Sir Charles Taylor. Hastings Council turned the application down saying that the reservoir was used entirely for domestic supply and not recreation purposes and must be protected from possible pollution. However, they did allow angling there including fishing from boats! Two requests from us to meet Hastings Council were turned down. They flatly refused even to discuss the matter with us.

1952 was a disappointing year, sailing wise, with only 25 of the 42 events scheduled actually being held due to the weather. It was decided to start next year's programme in the first week of April rather than May as before.

Mr Hyde designed the new starters hut and storage shed and a fund was started for this. It was built in time for the new sailing season. Up to now, race officials operated in the open in all weathers!

The ship's lamp which can be seen over the Bar was presented by Mr H. Uridge and he also gave the mahogany board used for Commodores' names.

After much debate for and against, the Club applied for and was granted a liquor licence. It was certainly to prove an added source of income for

the Club but some members were opposed to the idea on moral grounds and it was because of this that Steve Duckett, who had served us so well for so many years, stood down as Club Secretary.

Colonel Charles, who took over from Steve Duckett, told us at the AGM that the future of the Club was in jeopardy unless arrangements can be made for tuition of new members. Many prospective new members were enquiring about sail training and at that time there was no school around. In a bid to encourage these people it was suggested that boat owners adopt a new member and endeavour to take them out sailing as often as possible.

The Starters Hut Fund for £110 started only a year ago reached its target. Membership was stuck at around 170 so it was decided to cut subscriptions once again.

The rescue boat, the Club Cadet boat *Odette* and some members' boats were stored in the Marina Garage for the winter. The boat storage park was on the first floor up a long concrete ramp accessed from the bottom of Eversley Road, and it was quite a struggle to get the boats up there. However the area was light and dry with plenty of working space. Eventually, the Marina Garage was sold as was Fortes Ice Cream Parlour and was pulled down to make way for the (some say unattractive) Marina block of flats there now.

Another well known landmark to disappear in 1955 was the Hotel Metropole to the West of The De La Warr Pavilion adjacent to the present Miniature golf course. This building was occupied by the RAF during the war years, badly damaged by fire and bombed by 'tip and run' raiders

Mr Sholto Douglas, the man who had done so much to get the Bar up and running, was knighted. He was Chairman of the Wine Committee and used to give us most interesting and instructive talks on wine and its many ramifications. Some of the talks were at the delightful Dorset Cottage home of Eric Deuchars and the lectures were all the more enjoyable for the element of wine tasting involved.

Membership had now increased to nearly 200 but there were mutterings about our inadequate



Mrs Thelma Baber christens *Seadrift*, watched by William Howes, who built the boat in the club cellar.

headquarters. The basements get waterlogged, heavy rain penetrates the roof and the Rates have been doubled although we are a non profit-making organisation. The beach site is 150 yards away and rather crowded. We have virtually no storage space and we have to contend with rocks at low tide (we still do!). The first approach was made to the Council for a new site. On top of all this the Council

wanted to raise the Club's rent from £20 to £100 exclusive of Rates over a period of three years but the Club appealed vigorously and said that if this proposal went ahead, the Club would probably have to disband and members would have to do their sailing at Hastings or Pevensey. The Council

decided on a rent rise of £15 to £35 per year with immediate effect. .

During the winter and between flooding, Mr William Howes built a GP 14 from kit in the Club basement. This was then carefully lifted out and taken to the beach site where the launching ceremony took place with the boat being christened *Seadrift* by Mrs Thelma Baber, the Wife of our Commodore.

1951/52

During the winter of 1951/52 strong gales swept the Sussex coast and Eastbourne Sailing Club, on the corner of the parade by the Redoubt, was severely damaged and nearly swept away. We offered them the use of our premises and beach site if it would be of any help.

The Club had now reached its tenth anniversary and to mark the occasion the first of our Sailing Weeks was arranged, but more of this in another section of this book.

Club membership increased sharply to 260.

The Junior Section, open to youngsters between 10 and 16 years of age, and who were members of the junior sailing club, was dissolved and were incorporated into the Bexhill Sailing Club as Cadets between the ages of 14 and 18 (12 in the case of members' children) Those aged 18 or over became Ordinary members with full voting rights. This had the effect of increasing membership to over 300.

The Cadets wanted their own boat so they were loaned £50 by some senior members and they opened their own Boat Fund, being determined to repay the loan. The kit for the construction of a Cadet boat arrived on Christmas Eve. In overall charge was the tireless Commodore Roy Harrison assisted by William Howes and Guy Sheridan. So many keen Cadets wanted to work on the boat that there was not enough room around it for them all at the same time, this work being undertaken in the infamous basement of the headquarters. The boat was finished in the Spring and was launched and named *The Ark* by Mrs Peggy Gulliver.

1952

This year the Yachting Association was granted its Royal Charter by Her Majesty the Queen

The Club lease expired in 1960 and we badly needed new premises. The numbers attending the Club AGM at Club headquarters were such that they could not all be accommodated and the overflow had to stand in the passage. A lot of work had been going on behind the scenes and the Club requested the Council to agree a new HQ site on land to the WEST of the De La Warr Pavilion. A detailed report and plans were submitted. The preferred site was to the extreme West of the old Metropole Hotel site about quarter of the site for the new headquarters and the small lawn to the west for boat parking. The Club proposed to pay for all the work involved and ask only

for a modest rent. Sufficient land would remain for the Putting Course. A boat ramp to the beach would be needed. It was pointed out to the Council that our membership now stood at over 300 and was growing. In fact, at one stage, we closed membership applications because of the pressure on space.

The Estates and Parks Committee felt that the proposal was practicable and justified further enquiries but the Finance and General Purposes Committee could not support the proposals and the Council's policy was that the general use of the area in question should be for the benefit of the Council

*VIEW OF CLUBHOUSE
FROM THE WEST*



Artist impression, by Roy Harrison, of the proposed new Clubhouse, West of the De La Warr Pavilion at the Hotel Metropole site

and the Town as a whole. The voting in full Council was 9-9 and the Mayor's (Alderman Baker) casting vote was against.

Subsequent to this rejection, the Club put up an alternative plan, drawn up by Roy Harrison, through the Development Sub Committee under the chairmanship of Freddie Clare for a new Headquarters site. This plan was to build on the present Club site East of Channel View East with a frontage to De La Parade of about 420 feet on what was then considered to be a prime site. The Estates and Parks Committee recommended a detailed discussion with Club officials. Following these discussions, the Estates and Parks Committee expressed their concern at the anticipated loss of £500 worth of deck chair receipts in relation to the new site and the Club was asked to suggest an alternative site where the financial difficulties would be less. In reply the Club said that there were only two sites suitable, the Metropole site and the site at Channel View East.

At the full Council meeting, the Borough Treasurer was asked to prepare a report on the

financial implications of the Club developing either on the Metropole or the Channel View Sites.

Negotiations with the Council dragged on slowly. Councillor Corke said that the financial considerations from the deck chair charges were comparatively trivial compared with the possibility of having a strong sailing club to attract people to the Borough and he urged Councillors to treat the matter with a little more urgency. The Estates and Parks Committee met representatives of the Club to consider detailed proposals for the Clubhouse and boat

park. The Club was asking for an area 75 feet east of Channel View East to extend a further 330 feet and with a depth from the parade to a line slightly above high water mark. The Clubhouse would occupy a position 10 feet from the parade wall and be reached by a bridge. The building would be 68ft x 38ft and stand 13½ft above parade level. Access to the beach would be by a concrete ramp from the parade next to the Lay-By. The boat compound would be in the western area and would not interfere with the Public's free passage. The boat park was for 80 boats and the layout would permit

1952

The Mayor, Councillor Goodwin, presented the Club with a trophy, The Jubilee Cup, to be raced for annually and to commemorate the Town's 25th Jubilee year of Charter.



The plans are passed, materials arrive, the new clubhouse has become a reality.

the Council to provide three canvas wind break screens for deck chairs between Channel View and the Club site. The Clubhouse would be a semi prefabricated timber framed building erected on concrete or pile foundations.

The cost would be £5,000 and we would wish for a loan from the Council, repayable over 60 years. The Council were informed that membership was now 330 and had had to be restricted due to lack of facilities and space. The new premises should raise membership by a further 100.

The Committee said that they would propose to the full council deferral of consideration until next month to undertake further enquires on a number of details. At the March meeting of the Council the Sailing Club beach site was given the go ahead subject to the following provisos. The conditions to be observed by the Club included the right to park boats including those of bona fide visitors, boat gear launching and recovery tackle and that there was no exclusion of the general public from passing over the land. Boats were not to be taken from the parade except via the concrete ramp provided for that purpose and vice versa except that on 'open days' boats were permitted to be taken to the beach via the steps immediately south of the War Memorial. It should be noted that in the early days the strip of beach immediately east of Channel View East did not form part of the licenced site and was used for minor amusements such as trampolines and the like. The licence had also stipulated that no buildings were to be erected on the site. This meant that when it was decided to construct the present clubhouse further amendments to the licence had to be negotiated in addition to the statutory requirements of Planning Control, Bye-Laws etc. Boats parked on the beach are subject to an annual beach fee payable by the Club and an annual "beach count" is undertaken in co-operation with Beach Inspector to establish the annual fee.

The annual rent was to be £100 exclusive of Rates renewable after five years.

The beach site was not be exclusive to the Club but notices would be put up asking the Public to keep clear of the boats.



Access to beach level had to be provided first. Here the ramp begins to take shape.

At the April Council meeting the whole Sailing Club plan was referred back especially on the question of the loan.

At the July meeting the Council approved the Plan and a loan of £4,000 at 7 per cent

Perhaps it was coincidence that a few weeks earlier, following an appeal by the Mayor to local business and other organisations, the Sailing Club made a gift of a silver salver for the Mayor's Parlour ! It may be of interest that the site, a prime site in the Town, had been bought by the Council in 1935 for £35,000 to get rid of the fun fair. Previously it had been the site of the old Kursaal opened in 1896.

This is still not quite the end of the saga as the scheme had to go to the Ministry of Housing for approval and sure enough, before the year (1962) was out, the Minister of Housing and Local Government gave his approval for the lease of 703 square yards of beach by the Town Council to the Bexhill Sailing Club and his consent to the

1952

The RYA approved handicapping system was introduced into the Club this year with every boat being given a handicap number based on the Firefly at No 86. A few years later terylene sails started appearing and this caused some complications as handicapping had been based on cotton sails.

borrowing of £4,000 for 10 years. The Club was granted the lease of the site for twenty years with the option to renew for a further ten years.

Money for the new Clubhouse was obtained from a number of interest free loans, a £2,000 loan at 3 per cent from Mr C.C. Gulliver and many fund raising events. A grant for £3,430 was obtained from the Ministry of Education, this being about 50 per cent of the total cost and without which it is doubtful whether the scheme would have gone ahead. We were indebted to "Ginger" Gill for all the work he put in on our behalf.

Tenders went out, and at the end of February

work started on the new £8,000 Clubhouse when the first piles were driven. The building is supported on steel piles about 30ft deep upon which was laid a reinforced concrete floor slab. Whites

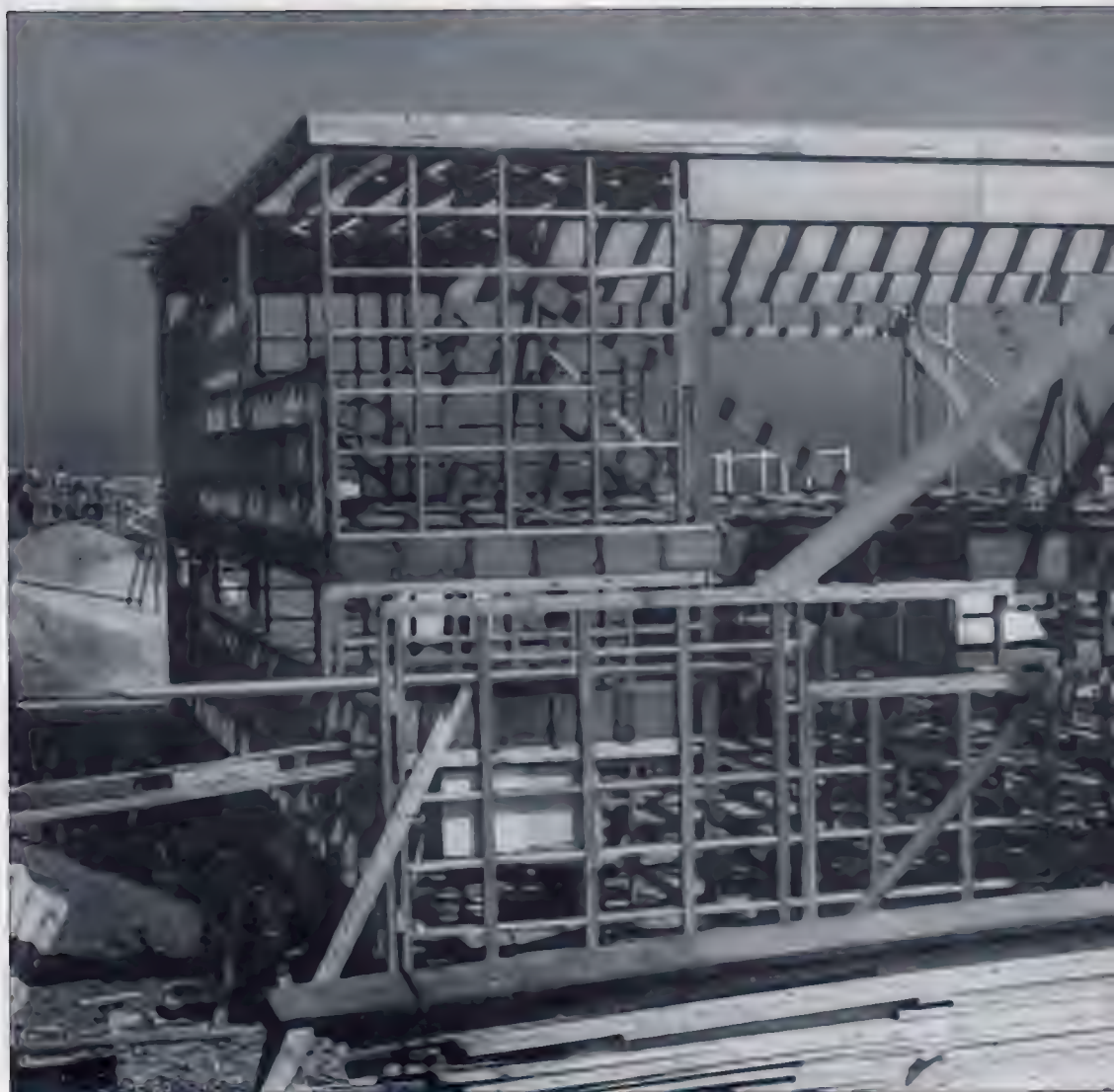
of Shoreham supplied the timber frame and a local Contractor was entrusted to assemble and erect it. The winch was removed from the Starters' Hut and resited in the new building. So until it

was fitted and wired up, it was all hands to the rope just like the old days. The building fund stood at £550 and in June the building had advanced to the stage when the internal work could be started.

Nearly all the internal work, namely partitions,

1958

John Baber presented the Club with the Gapsite King's Trophy still being contested and awarded annually.



plasterboard to walls and ceilings, plumbing, electrical installation, the construction of the first temporary bar, the galley, the committee room (now the beer store) and painting were all undertaken by volunteer Club members. Work parties went on regularly on weekday evenings as well as some weekends. Roy Harrison, the Architect, nearly built the place himself! Eventually we reached the stage when it was possible to move in and 3rd October was 'Moving Day'. There was a race on Sunday, the first organised from the new Clubhouse and it was noted that, on that first occasion, some members walked over the polished wood floor of the Lounge in wet sailing gear. What's new? Work continued throughout the winter and during the year

completing the interior structures and decorating the new Clubhouse. A new flag pole, the one we have now, was erected and a new cable supplied for the winch. An electric clock was installed near the Course Board with a repeater clock in the Starters Box.

The Club licence had to be deferred until the fire escape staircase on the west side of the Club was built following the Fire Brigade recommendations. This was built by Mr Ron Newton.

The Bar was built in a clinker design mirroring traditional boat design, by John Pagram who only charged us his material costs. The Bar has since been extended and redesigned and was completely renewed in 1996 bringing it up to date with the latest environmental health regulations.



Left Timber framing goes up and the new clubhouse starts to take on recognisable shape. Viewed from the promenade.



Below: Foundations laid, almost ready to start on the building.



Olympic medallist opens new Clubhouse

ON 26th June 1965 Mr Keith Musto, the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Silver Medallist in the Flying Dutchman Class, performed the opening ceremony. Present were the Mayor and Mayoress, Councillor and Mrs E.J. Robinson, Commodores and Officers from other East Sussex Sailing Clubs, our own Commodore Mr F.W. Clare, our Vice Commodore and the Architect Mr R.E.G. Harrison and many others.

After the opening ceremony on the balcony, champagne was served and over 200 people tested the capacity of the Lounge and the solidity of the structure. Then a handicap race was organised in rather a choppy sea and Keith Musto sailed the Albacore Appleturlover crewed by Mike Adams and Jim Thompson into third place with Gordon and Malcolm Viner coming first in their Albacore Perdita, winning the cup for the Club Opening Day race. They very kindly donated the trophy to the Club, to be presented annually to the best Lady helm. The day was rounded off with dancing in the evening.

Regatta and Sea Week...

...Sailing Club members let their hair down for their annual holiday at home

THE very first regatta took place in 1893, the year the Rowing Club was formed. They moved to the former Coastguard longboat house at the Colonnade in 1910 and are there still.

The Bexhill Town regattas which included races for rowing, sailing, motor boats and canoes, held annually pre the 1939/45 war, were suspended during the war years but were resurrected again after a 9 year gap in 1948. The start/finish line was at the Colonnade and the regatta was watched by enormous crowds. There were masses of flags and bunting which caused great confusion for the sailors in identifying their signals.

The first sailing regatta run on its own separate course from the rowers was held on Saturday 13th August 1949. The day started bright, sunny and calm but later there was a stiff south-westerly breeze with white horses breaking out to sea and a surf breaking ashore. Members of the Regatta Committee which included a representative from the sailing club had to meet early on the Saturday morning to decide whether or not to hold the regatta, and telephone their decision round to the Clubs in Sussex and Kent to avoid unnecessary journeys.

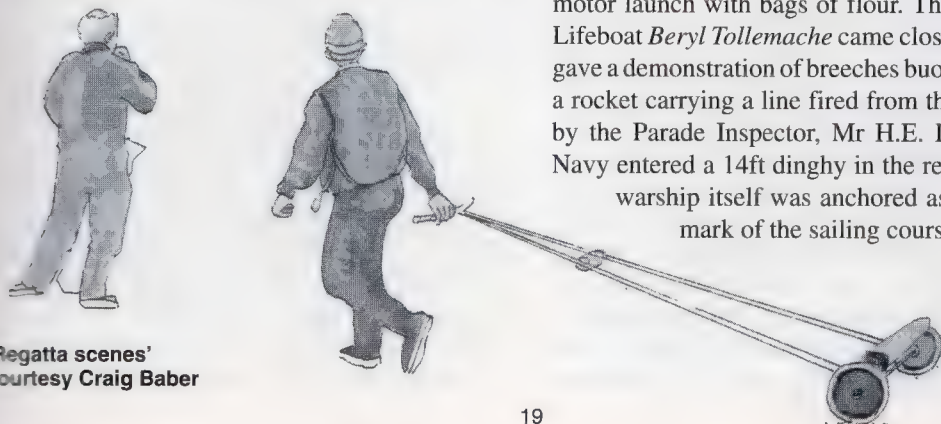
The Town was honoured by a courtesy visit from the Navy with the presence of the frigate *HMS Starling* a modified Black Swan Class sloop of 1,568 tons, 299 feet long twin screw 4,300 HP. She had a compliment of 7 Officers and 105 Men under the command of Commander J.B. Laing DSC. She



HMS Starling, 'on station', off Bexhill in 1949.

was commissioned in 1943 and operated in the Western Approaches during the war destroying 14 U-Boats. She had become a training ship for *HMS Dryad*, the navigation school at Southwick. The Mayor's party visited the ship via the whaler and cutter. On his return the Mayor was carried ashore pic-a-back! A party of 'pirates' landed wearing sackcloths and blackened faces, carrying brooms and dustbin lids, they rushed ashore at the Colonnade behind their leader who promptly fell flat on his face in the shingle. He was soon up and carrying a black flag with the skull and crossbones, they raided the De La Warr Pavilion and ran the flag up the flagpole; but they were then beaten back to their waterlogged whaler by enthusiastic young boys.

An Auster light aircraft piloted by Ray Chandler with Len Chandler as bomb aimer bombed the motor launch with bags of flour. The Eastbourne Lifeboat *Beryl Tollemache* came close inshore and gave a demonstration of breeches buoy rescue with a rocket carrying a line fired from the Colonnade by the Parade Inspector, Mr H.E. Delaney. The Navy entered a 14ft dinghy in the regatta and the warship itself was anchored as the western mark of the sailing course.



Regatta scenes'
courtesy Craig Baber

The Battle Class Destroyer *HMS Vigo* graced the 1955 Regatta. Photographed here by a member of the club, who had heard stories of the Navy's rum ration and the generosity of sailors no doubt!



The 1951 regatta saw the arrival of the Battle Class Destroyer *HMS Finnisterre*. She anchored a mile offshore of the De La Warr Pavilion and was accompanied by a DUKW (an amphibious vehicle). She was a grand sight at night lit up overall. Lieutenant Commander J.F. House DSC was in command. Officers were entertained at the Sailing Club on Saturday evening and some Club members visited the ship on Sunday.

Two years later we had a return visit from *HMS Starling* under Lieutenant Commander Mules DSC for the best regatta to date. 300 oarsmen from 10 clubs and 45 sailing craft from 4 clubs competed in the rowing and sailing races. We entertained the

Officers at the Sailing Club on the Saturday evening and some 50 sailing members were entertained by the Navy on board on Sunday morning, being ferried out in batches in the rescue boats. Many were ferried back ashore in a distinctly merry state – Naval hospitality being what it is!

Up until now, regattas had been a one day affair but from 1954 onwards the regatta was run over two days. The Saturday races were for Town Trophies, trophies donated by various individuals and businesses especially for the regatta. On this day the rowing club held their races. There was good co-

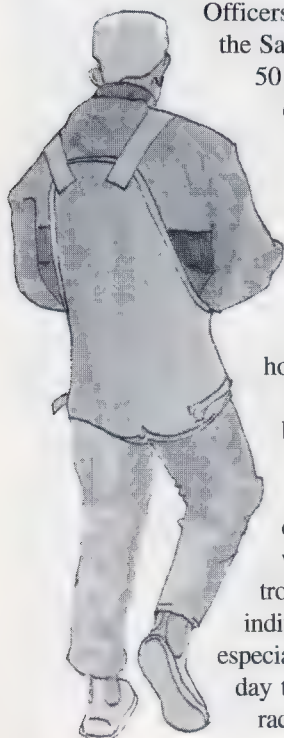
operation between the two clubs and we usually managed to keep out of each other's way, our Club laying its course purposely to avoid the rowing course. There was then further racing on Sunday for our trophies.

The 1955 Bexhill regatta merited something better in the eyes of the Navy and they honoured us with the Battle Class Destroyer *HMS Vigo*, 3,280 tons, 379ft long and manned by 12 Officers and 191 Ratings.

The Club was 10 years old in 1957 and to mark the occasion, we held our first Sailing Week. Entirely through our own efforts, we persuaded the Royal Navy to honour us with the presence of two minesweepers for the week. *HMS Gavington* and *HMS Beachhampton* duly sailed along from Portsmouth and anchored a mile offshore and were used as marks of the course for racing. Bexhill Council were supportive and agreed to the roping off of an area of beach by the Sailing Club and the Club was granted the use of 50 deck chairs during the week for £5. Neither Eastbourne nor Hastings were graced by the Navy that year. The Bexhill Observer reported "To pull off a naval visit by two minesweepers especially after the official difficulty over suggested naval visits for the regatta in the last few years is a real feather in the cap for all in the (sailing) Club. Someone must have known how to do it. Be that as it may, it meant, coupled with the superb weather, a splendid weekend for Bexhill and the thanks of the Town are due to the Club in no uncertain manner."

In the handicap class racing, a catamaran – a rather rare phenomenon in those days – named *Swell Baby* lapped the fleet and finished 33 minutes ahead of the next boat. But as no-one knew how to handicap her she was given a special prize.

Bexhill Council must have been impressed by our success because the next year they provided a very



colourful display of flowers to mark Sailing Week and the regatta in the carpet bedding site to the east of the De La Warr Pavilion, now sadly obliterated by the car park. A total of 8,700 flowers were transferred from the Corporation Nursery to form a boat display. There were 3,500 red anthurium for the sails, 1,000 yellow mezebryanthemums for the hull, 1,000 orange anthurium for the cabin and spars and 200 purple sedum for the portholes.

During the regatta weekend in 1959 the House Committee served 700 teas. Food for thought.

During the 60's the armed forces were being run down and the Navy felt the axe like the other Services. But in 1961 they were able to send the coastal minesweeper *HMS Beachhampton* for the second time to our regatta. She kindly donated a plaque to the Club to match the one given by her sister ship *HMS Gavington* several years earlier.

The mid 60's to the late 70's were probably the peak in popularity for regattas and Open meetings. Our record entry was 127 boats raced in 9 separate classes in the 1973 regatta. As can be imagined those sorts of numbers stretched the resources of the Club both on the water and socially. The Starters and Timekeepers were split into two sections using the existing upper starters box and the lower station underneath. That particular year was fine and hot, and this, combined with a large crowd, meant that the Club ran out of beer. A disaster!

It was customary in those days for cakes and sandwiches to be supplied by Club members and all refreshments were free for the sailors.

Sea Week also proved to be a highly popular and very successful item in the Club's calendar with



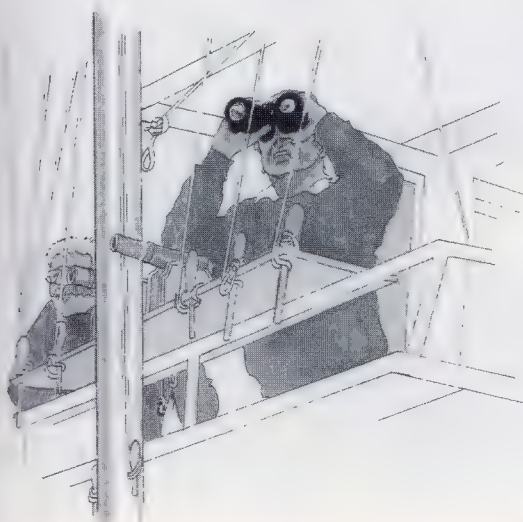
many families taking a week's holiday at that time (as they still do). Apart from the sailing activities the social side was not overlooked. We always held a barbecue during the week usually on the beach but not always at the Club. One year, in 1966, by kind permission of the Gullivers, the barbecue was held at Worsham Farm and was attended by 180 members and friends. It was noted that 100 chops, 14lbs of sausages, 56 lbs of potatoes, 250 hamburger rolls and 100 ham rolls were eaten. We took our own portable bar and set it up in the field and hurricane and tilley lamps boosted the light from the bonfire.

We had started using radio by now and some years the Royal Naval Reserve Wireless Training Unit provided ship to shore wireless communication between the Starters and the Rescue Boat. Some youngsters on the boat end of the radio link had to be brought ashore looking rather green.

We consistently had entries in the 90's for the regattas at that time. Eastbourne, Sovereign, Pevensey Bay and Hastings Sailing Clubs also ran regattas and we used to support each other as much as possible in taking part and supplying rescue facilities. It was our Club policy not to arrange racing during the week end of our neighbours' regattas. Later this was changed and for those who could not or did not wish to travel to other clubs, a series of races known as the 'Lazy B' series was run.

Gradually as we moved into the 1980's, people did not travel so much for a variety of reasons, partly expense, and numbers began falling off. Also, one by one, our neighbouring clubs no longer held regattas. Now Bexhill is the only Club in this area that still does.

Individual regattas as such were, in effect, superseded by The East Sussex Coastal Sailing Federation Clubs deciding to stage the Federation regattas hosted by one Club in turn and open to all the other clubs. This has been going on for four years now and has proved to be very successful with good attendances.



Dinners and Dances...

...no cries of starboard – and ladies beware the gybe mark during the waltz!

AN important part of Club activity has always been the social gatherings at dances and the Annual Dinner, not always held together in the early days.

One of the first dinners and prize-givings was held at the Whitehill Hotel next to the Denbigh Pub. About 30 members and guests attended. A separate dance evening was held in the early days at the Devonshire Hotel in their first floor ballroom. This was always popular and eventually grew to large attendances which necessitated moving to the grander Sackville Hotel ballroom. The Sailing Club Annual Ball was one of the leading social events in the town until the Sackville closed down in 1957.

The climax to the 1953 Annual Dinner at the Granville Hotel was a community singing session which included 'Alouette', 'Ich bin ein Musicale' and 'I'm the son of a Sailing Member'.

During that time, the annual dinner and prize-giving took place at various venues, mainly at the Granville, now renamed The Grand, in Sea Road, where there was, in addition, dancing in the basement ballroom, but also at the Royal Victoria Hotel in St Leonards and at the Cavendish Hotel in Eastbourne.

One sombre occasion is remembered. It was the day that President Kennedy was assassinated and the annual dinner that evening was quite a subdued affair.

By the time that our present Clubhouse was completed it was decided that the annual Dinner/Dance should take place 'at home'. However, the very first dance in the new Clubhouse was held during Sea Week in 1964 when work had progressed sufficiently to allow this. The 1960's was when stiletto heels were the fashion, and to protect the floor stiletto heel caps were on sale at the door. In spite of this those wretched little spikey things did damage the floor and now the Club Bye-Laws ban them. The Architect for the first annual dinner in the Clubhouse was the much missed Secretary of the Club, Robin Blake. Outside caterers from Eastbourne – Edouard Frederic – were engaged and Mr Starling performed miracles of 'matchbox organisation' by seating and feeding an average of 120 diners. This meant very hard work for some of the Club members. The beach level boathouse was cleared out completely as were the changing rooms



Some youthful looking members at the Whitehill Hotel Annual Dinner.

and the small boat store, carpeted and festooned with coloured lights in the ceiling and generally spruced up to form an almost unrecognisable reception area and bar where members and VIP's had drinks before ascending to the Lounge for Dinner. The practice of 'piping aboard' the top table of Commodores and Guests was then started. Lt Colonel Sheehan presented the Club with a 'pusser' naval bosun's pipe and chain and John Royle was appointed the first personal piper to the Commodore. This practise continues to this day.

After dinner and prize-giving the Lounge had to be cleared for dancing, the current popular Group being let in at about 10.30 pm. This arrangement carried on for many years after Robin died and was organised by Hugh Maynard and, later, Adrian Alpine.

The venue and atmosphere was very much envied by our neighbouring Clubs, their Commodores and Ladies being invited guests each year. To many, it was a sad day when the venue was moved elsewhere although many very good Dinner/dances continued to be held, usually in a local Hotel.

The Clubhouse Dinner/dances were not without incident. On one never to be forgotten occasion preparations of the boathouse were completed on the Thursday evening before the Friday dinner. A gale sprung up during the night and coincided with

Spring Tides. At about 4.00am (the dinner was due to start at 7.00pm) the sea broke through the doors and left about a foot of water throughout. It was hectic work getting everywhere dried out as best as possible but the evening went without further hitch.

It was the practice in the the early days to have all the trophies and prizes proudly spread out on display on the top table. On one occasion, Stan Gittins, the then Hon Secretary, seeing a bottle of wine on the table in front of him, opened it up and handed it round – and in no time at all the bottle was empty! What he did not realise was that this bottle of wine was a prize (won after a series of 13 races by Hugh Maynard!) and it needed some very quick thinking on

the part of the Rear Commodore when it came to the presentations!

The night of the annual dinner always seemed to herald the blocking up of the drains. This was not the best of things to happen at any time. On a number of occasions, it must have caused any passing pedestrian on the parade astonishment if he or she looked over the railings, to see some stalwart Club members in full dinner jacket and black tie busily rodding the drains by torchlight.

We expect our Commodores to be 'Jack of all Trades' and one of their unwritten responsibilities is the very important post as 'Captain of the Heads'

1953

The Granville Hotel presented the Club with a trophy for a race to be held on Coronation Day. Coronation Day was on Tuesday 2nd June and was declared a Public Holiday. A race was duly organised but it attracted only two boats. The weather was wet and windy and the pull of TV with pictures now being shown in colour was too great.

Bexhill Marina?

BEFORE the present Sovereign Harbour came into existence, there was a serious £1 million scheme in 1963 to turn the then vacant land at West Parade – part of the Ravenshear Estate and now the site of the Larkin blocks of flats – into a deep water anchorage with access to the sea, via a lock at the Western end of the site. This proposal was by the the firm Freville-Cookson Ltd.

Also specified was a 'Boatel' and Club at the Brockley Road end with shops, offices and a jetty out to sea. The harbour would be for up to 500 boats up to 80 ft in length and would be approached by a lock spanned by a lift bridge on to the Parade with hard standing for 250 dinghies. It would have been the only land locked harbour in 120 miles of coast.

A Public Meeting was arranged at the Elizabeth Room of the De La Warr Pavilion, but so many people turned up the meeting had to be hurriedly moved to the Main Hall to accommodate the numbers.

After many rumours and counter rumours over a long period of time, the necessary financial backing was not forthcoming and the scheme came to nought.

History of the classes...

...handicap or adopted – and after all these years, that is still the question

ON its foundation in 1947, Rule 1 stated amongst other aims under 'Objects of the Club' that its ultimate aim was to establish a Bexhill One Design Class. These were high hopes and praiseworthy ambitions but this aim was not to be. Even before Bexhill Sailing Club was founded, Mr J.E. Maynard (Jack) had a 14ft dinghy, a Salcombe One design, built pre-war and originally with a bamboo mast, named *Budlet* based at his Veness Gap site. Shortly after the war, a sister boat named *Esmeralda* was built for Hugh Maynard by Smith and Gibbs of Eastbourne. These 'Gap' boats were designed by Edgar Cove of Salcombe, originally as an estuary boat. For use on our beaches, enlarged rubbing strakes were fitted, She carried 120 square feet of sail and was a completely open boat with no decking. She was not really designed as a racing boat. *Budlet* and *Esmeralda* could be said to be the nucleus of the Club.

The Club was fortunate to have Mr Bernard Noakes, a boatbuilder, who with the help of 'Eddie' Edwards built some of the first Yachting World Merlins, a newly designed racing dinghy and the forerunner of the Merlin Rocket in his workshop. The Merlin was designed by Jack Holt and the Rocket designed by Wyche and Coppock. They combined to form the present day Merlin Rocket. The Merlin had a taller mast and was less stable. The Rocket with its 2ft shorter mast was more stable but slower.

The Club started with just two handicap classes – Class 'A' for 14ft dinghies and the Merlins of which there were 14 and Class 'B' for boats under 14ft. All boats were given a personal recall number.

Another boat which started to build up in numbers in those early days was one we called the Fuss. The Fuss was first designed in 1939 as a new one-design class for Poole Harbour. She was 14ft

long. The aim of the designer was to produce a good sea boat capable of standing up to heavy weather and yet maintain a good turn of speed. She had a 20ft mast and 120 square feet of canvas. She has been adopted by the Irish Dinghy Racing Association and over 100 boats have been built for racing in Ireland and a number built for the Royal Natal Yacht Club in Durban.

By 1949, the Club was expanding and took up residence in its Channel View East Headquarters now Bexhill Social Rowing Club and four Classes were sailed. Class 'A' was entirely for Merlins, Class 'B' was for 14ft dinghies of various descriptions, Class 'C' for 12ft dinghies with the beginnings of the Firefly Class (F 541, 542 and 544). Class 'D' comprised the remainder with the nucleus being the Yachting World Cadet Class (C 95, 96, 176 and 296). The Cadet was designed by Ian Proctor mainly for children to learn in. Apart from the Merlins in Class 'A' all other boats sailed in handicap classes with a time allowance on the scratch boat based on past performance.

This was the forerunner of the future PHSA

handicapping system which was introduced a few years later. Additionally a cumulative penalty of 3 minutes, 2 minutes and 1 minute respectively by the 1st, 2nd and 3rd boats in each race was awarded.

All Classes have their own Class Rules and the Firefly Class insisted on a positive buoyancy test annually in those early days. The brand new Fireflies, mentioned above, straight from the builders, underwent their buoyancy tests in Egerton Park boating lake.

Hugh Maynard, Roy Harrison and Richard Petherbridge waded about in thigh boots in the muddy waters piling bags of stones in their boats and filling them to the gunwhales with water to try

1953

Moonlight Picnic. A picnic at a pre-arranged point on the coast was to be held weather permitting, on a certain Saturday. The final decision was to be made by the House Committee at 1800 hours and it was proposed that Members should leave the Club site at 1900 hours. Bring your own food. This rather daring idea, albeit serious at the time, did not take place because there was no moon!

to sink them, happily without success, so they passed the test !

The Firefly was designed by Uffa Fox in 1946 to provide one-design dinghy racing at low cost. It was one of the first boats to be moulded from laminated veneers and was of hot moulded construction. It was chosen as a single hander for the 1948 sailing Olympics at Torbay where young Paul Elvström won the first of his many gold medals.

A special mention must be made of the appearance of an extraordinary craft named *Tincantoo*, a 12ft dinghy of all metal construction, having a tripod mast and no inbuilt buoyancy. It never sank, however, in spite of being sailed by its owner Mr Gordon Davies who was usually full of the joys of Spring and other liquids!

In the 1950's, the Merlin Rocket Class was firmly established at Bexhill and also at Hastings and Rye Sailing Clubs. A Mobile Merlin Series was run. Racing was held alternately at Hastings and Bexhill and if the weather was bad racing was switched to Rye Harbour where conditions were usually possible on the river. This maximised the resources of all three Clubs and resulted in a good turnout of boats. Rye Harbour Sailing Club opened their facilities to visitors during the winter series and Bexhill were keen partakers with a variety of boats of all classes. Dry suits and even wet suits had not been invented in those days, so you had to be tough (or mad). One winter, in 1956, three races had to be cancelled because of torrential rain and flooding and on one occasion because of ice floes in the river.

Mr 'Ratty' Rowson donated his Cadet boat to the Club for the use of the Cadet Section which was now in the throes of getting established, but as it was too small for adults to use it was sold and the money raised used to go towards buying a GP 14. Strict rules were laid down as to its use and bookings at 7/6d (37½p) per session were made through the Club Bosun, Mr Derry Longley, or Mr Christopher Hook, the Bosun's Mate. The boat was named *Call Girl*.



By 1955 the Merlin Class was 8 strong and the Firefly Class had strengthened to 9 boats. The GP 14 was another Class to catch on and by 1958 we had 10 boats on the beach and the class was adopted.

1957 was the year the Portsmouth Harbour Handicapping Numbers were revised by multiplying them by 1.2 to enable catamarans to be included in the scheme.

In 1960, the Albacore Class was adopted, there being 12 boats racing. The Albacore was developed for Fairey Marine by Uffa Fox from the 15ft Swordfish, first built in 1947. In the meantime, the Firefly Class had increased to 15 boats and Mickey Cook, sailing F267 *Vector* was National Champion. By now the International Cadet Class had regular racing provided. Cadet 2940 *The Ark* was owned by the Club for use by the Cadet Section. So these Classes, together with the GP 14 were our four adopted Classes, all other boats racing in the Handicap Class.

The ideal situation, of course, would be to have only Class racing and no handicapping at all. However, people are individuals and most want to

do their own thing. They would agree to Class racing if everyone raced the class of boat they sailed! A proposal at the AGM in 1960 to restrict entry of Classes other than the Firefly, GP 14, Albacore and Cadet was not carried, but an amendment regarding adopted classes and regular club racing made as in our present Bye Laws was carried.

It should be mentioned in passing that the early Fireflies and Albacores were very basic and not like the present day craft with rolled decks, muscle boxes and masses of controls. The centreplate was a heavy metal plate and sails were of cotton, which, when they got wet, were very heavy.

Steady progress continued at the Club and by 1962 the Albacore Class numbered 14, there were 7 Merlins, 7 GP 14's and 22 Fireflies ranging from the oldest F150 *Trout* to the latest F 2710 *Silver Dolphin*, and two of the original Fireflies, F 541 and F542, *Pipit* and *Wildfire* were still racing competitively.

Numbers fell off in the Merlin and GP 14 Classes and these Classes were de-adopted in 1963 but the remaining boats continued to race in the Handicap Class

The first National Solo appeared in the Club in 1965, Pat Sinden's *So Long*, as did two boats of a new racing Class, the Scorpion (designed by T. Dorling), owned by the Mowll family, SC 577 and 645.

By 1966, the Firefly Class had grown to a very strong 27 boats and because of their numbers, it was considered appropriate to award 1st and 2nd prizes in their Club races. There was now a second Club Cadet *Coracle*. The Down Secondary Modern School had their own Cadet *Coppit*. The Bexhill Grammar School for Boys had the use of their Graduates *Dolphin* and *Marlin* under the instruction of schoolmaster Tom Meekings. This was also the year that Catamarans first appeared in the Club with three Swifts.

By 1968, The National Scorpion Class had proved itself as a boat that was here to stay, both nationally and locally with 12 boats at Bexhill and the Class being adopted. One of the first Scorpions was Number 9 *Bakka Takka* owned by Dick Wells.

So the Scorpion Class joined the Firefly, Albacore and Cadets as adopted Classes. The Bexhill Down School added a Graduate to their two Cadets. Firefly 298 *Shrimp* was donated to the Club by Mrs Peggy Gulliver in 1969 for Members' use.

The Scorpion Class was proving to be too much competition for the Albacores, so in 1969 the Albacores lost their adopted status and had to revert to racing in the Handicap Class.

1970, and the Firefly Class had grown to an incredible 31 boats (two of the original Fireflies F 541 and F 542 were still there). Scorpions were well established with 15 boats and another new

dinghy appeared on the scene – the Mirror Dinghy. Also the first Condors joined the Swift Catamarans.

1972 and the Scorpions were up to 18 boats. The Mirror dinghy proved to be a good sea boat and a good training boat to challenge the Cadet, especially on price and this was shown by a sudden upsurge in numbers to 13 with adoption status being granted. Catamarans were also becoming popular

with a section of the sailing fraternity, with the Swifts being joined by Condors, Sheerwaters and Lynx. The Lynx was designed and built by Club Member George Newton who raced his prototype No 1 successfully at Bexhill.

The Club's adopted classes encouraged plenty of competition but a lot of experimenting was going on with different designs as witness the fact that 30 different classes of boat were on the club register.

In 1973, we had three adopted classes, Firefly (still) Scorpion and Mirror. Including the Club Mirror *Reflection* and two Mirrors owned and sailed by the girls of Ancaster House School the class numbered 29. The following year, two more classes were recognised, Albacore and Solo. A recognised class is one for which class racing will be provided at the discretion of the Sailing Committee, an intermediate step to adopted status.

By 1975, the Albacore Class were promoted to full adoption status again and the Firefly finally lost its adopted status after 26 years.

1981 saw the de-adoption of the Solo Class, but with the Albacore, Scorpion and Mirror still going

1953

It was customary in those early days for boats racing to fly a racing flag. A sailing instruction now appeared as follows :- "On retiring from a race a boat must keep clear of the course and haul down her racing flag. Club burgees should be flown when not racing." It was also about this time that RYA regulations stipulated that all class certificates have to be checked and annual buoyancy tests became compulsory.

strong; but by 1984, the Scorpion numbers had fallen away so that the Class had to be de-adopted. All classes rise and fall in popularity over the years and it has always been thus.

Now a completely new phenomenon appeared on the scene – the Sailboard.

Any boat not in an adopted class had to race in the Dinghy Handicap Class which was restricted to boats with a maximum PHSA Number of 124, but the Topper was proving to be a very popular boat and as her Handicap Number was 136, she was given her own Class flag and raced with the Mirror Dinghy. All Catamarans raced on a handicap basis.

1986, and yet another popular boat established itself in sufficient numbers to be given its own Class Flag – the Laser. This was also the year that Miracles became independent and adopted.

The Miracle dinghy class grew quickly in numbers, helped a lot by being many of the sailing school students first choice of boat – an excellent one to learn in. In fact by 1990 the Miracles at Bexhill had the largest class fleet in Great Britain, but as was to be proved later, sheer numbers are not everything.

The problem with the dinghy handicap has been

and still is that of trying to lay on a race of sufficient duration and course size when trying to cater for boats of such widely differing capabilities – for example a 5-0-5 and a Solo. The problem has been overcome to a certain extent by the use of the ‘lap

average system’ which means that all boats in that handicap class, irrespective of how fast or slow they are, will race for much more similar lengths of time, albeit still using the same course.

To start with, all boats without their own adopted status raced in a single dinghy handicap. From 1972 to 77 things were made fairer by splitting the Dinghy Handicap into Fast and Slow sections. Meanwhile all Catamarans continued sailing in one Catamaran Class and all Sailboards raced separately on equal terms.

From 1978 onwards the lower limit for Club racing had been set at PHSA 124 so this meant that the Mirror and Topper were taken out of the Dinghy Handicap to form their own Slow Handicap Class and all other boats were combined into a single Handicap Class.

In other words, we were back, more or less, as the Club started with two Handicap Classes.

1949



The Estate Agents and Auctioneers Association presented the Club with a superb trophy which, in those days, was valued at about £80.

RAF Wartling



THE RAF Station at Wartling started as a small unit with mobile equipment, one of a chain of radar defence units throughout South East England. In 1943, a permanent station was built with a range of 80 miles, later increased to 250 miles. It took an active part in the destruction of 59 aircraft and 244 V1 flying bombs.

Squadron Leader McGrath led a band of keen Officers in joining in the Club's activities with their first boat, a GP 14 named *Java*. Such was the interest that in 1957 the Club conferred block membership to RAF Wartling to include Other Ranks as well as Officers especially because of their transient stay in the area. They added two Albacores to their little fleet in time and raced regularly as often as duties would permit. They very kindly supplied us with Met reports when asked and donated a trophy – The R.A.F. Wartling Cup which was raced for and still is now, in the Wednesday Evening Series.

This happy association continued until 1967 when the Station was closed down.

Buoys...

...any colour you like – as long as it's black!

IN 1959, the Sailing Committee thought that having some permanent racing marks would be a good thing, and three 1¼ cwt buoys, ex-Admiralty, of 3' 6" diameter at a cost of £50 to £60 were purchased. John Royle prepared the necessary charts and permission was applied for to the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation and their consent was duly given. The Sussex Sea Fisheries Commission asked that concrete sinkers be used to moor the buoys instead of anchors to prevent damage to gear of the occasional trawler which might wish to work in the locality. Chains and concrete sinkers were bought, the buoys were painted yellow and the marks were laid on 7th June at one mile radius on the geographical co-ordinates supplied by John Royle as follows

1. Lat 50-49-38 N Long 0-27-57 E
2. Lat 50-49-15 N Long 0-28-48 E
3. Lat 50-49-52 N Long 0-29-33 E

The consent was for three years and all the buoys and moorings had to be removed on or before the 30th September and not replaced before the 1st April. There were dates specified in the racing calendar for the buoy laying and removal operations.

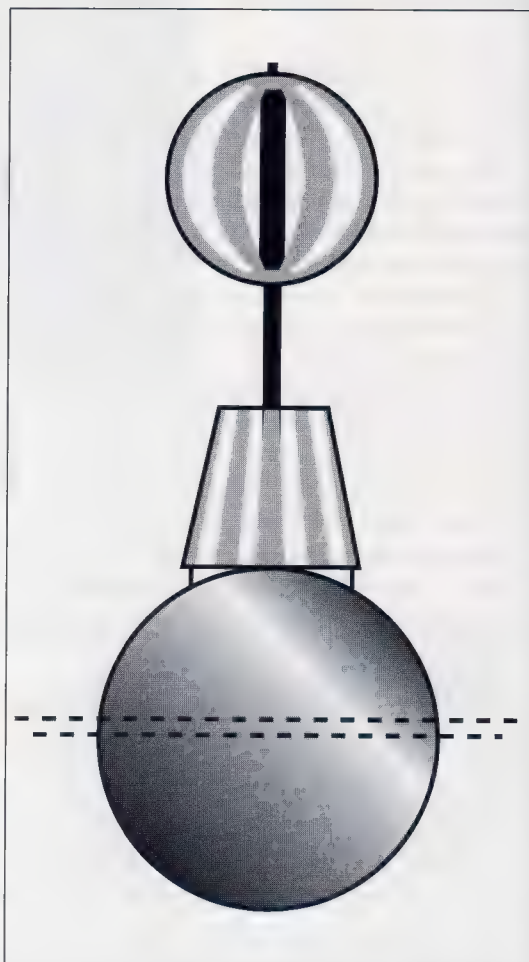
The buoys were laid and lifted with considerable difficulty by our rescue boat the "F.C. Crosse" and extra protection was lashed to the gunwhales to prevent damage when dragging the chains on board. The buoys, when ashore for the winter, had to have algae and barnacles scraped off and then painted with zinc chromate and anti fouling.

After the first year's trials, it was decided to fix topmarks to the buoys to make them more visible and also fix extra lengths of chain. We also used old engine blocks as sinkers.

Permission was renewed in 1962 by the Ministry of Transport, but in the Autumn of that year all the buoys drifted in a very severe gale and in fact one buoy went missing. The search for the mark extended as far as Dungeness without any success but eventually in the Spring of the next year the mark was 'found' at Hastings. This prompted us to paint names on our buoys and they were called 'Rosemary' – wife of the then President, Ronnie

Andrews, 'Pip' – wife of the then Rear Commodore Freddie Clare, and 'Tuppenny' – wife of our late Secretary Colonel Charles.

The Board of Trade took over the issuing of consents in 1965 and it was then that we ran into a spot of bother with the Hastings Fishermen's Association, who reported that one of their members had damaged his nets and hit one of our marks in the dark.



We then had day marks welded on which were can shaped, of wire mesh 21" high and 18" diameter and painted day-glo orange; and above the topmarks a basket shape 24" diameter and painted day-glo orange. This seemed to make everyone happy. However we did have the inevitable problem with

seagulls leaving their distinctive visiting cards!

The third mark was abandoned in 1968 and subsequently one mark only was laid as the South mark on a bearing of 160°M. The system, now perfected, was to manhandle the buoy, chain and sinker on to the sand at low tide and pick them up with the rescue boat on the rising tide. Similarly on lifting, motor out to the buoy at low tide, secure the boat to the buoy and let the tide do the lifting.

Apart from the permanent marks, we have had a vast variety of temporary marks. Some of the first used were the fishermen's dan type buoys with a cork base and a bamboo pole. Then polystyrene blocks with flags on poles attached. Thanks to Gordon Viner, tractor inner tubes lashed together to make a buoy of some 4 to 5 feet diameter floated well and was easily transportable. We also used many round and inflatable ball type buoys but these were not very visible and we had complaints from visitors at our Open Meetings. The question of sponsorship and advertising was looked at. Occasionally a dinghy with its mast up was pressed into service. The Crewsaver buoy came on the market in 1973 and we bought and used three. These had very good visibility provided they were weighted properly. They did require 1/2cwt counterbalance weight to ensure they

floated upright. Ex sash window counter weights were ideal for the purpose. At one stage we experimented with a flotation collar prompted by the the pictures on our TV's of returning space missions landing on the Atlantic Ocean.

Jim Witham made experimental buoys but the first one on test at sea in a gale resulted in its loss plus the loss of three Club anchors and warps. The second one tested at Wallers Haven river on the Pevensey marshes sank.

On one occasion Jim's prototype buoy out on test was mistaken by a member of the public for a Russian submarine's conning tower! Another mark which looked promising was the tetrahedron buoy – a triangular inflatable mark – which was very light and just floated on the surface. But it was also very bulky and difficult to transport.

Bexhill Council lay white round buoys to mark the motor boat ski lanes during the summer and these have been utilised from time to time. Another very permanent mark which has been used when conditions are right is the Hastings long sea outfall buoy, a large yellow can mark. A long-standing debate concerns the best colour for a buoy – black, white, yellow, orange or what? We have tried most colours in our time and the debate continues.

Much debate has ensued over the years, about the merits or not of using black buoys. There has been speculation of a specialist firm starting up in Bexhill to corner the market in state-of-the-art black buoys!



Team racing

TEAM racing, of a sort, started in 1951 when a small fleet of boats from Bexhill sailed to Pevensey Bay and met up with a small fleet of boats which had sailed from Eastbourne. We all had a picnic lunch on the beach and then engaged in a friendly sailing match – which Bexhill won.

The first proper team race was against Bognor Sailing Club at Bognor in 1953 in their adopted class boat, the 14ft Jewel. This was followed the next year against Bognor in our class boat the Merlin and continued on a regular basis with alternating venues until 1959.

In 1957, there was a team race between Bexhill, Rye Harbour, Hastings and St Leonards and Sussex Motor Yacht Club raced in Merlins, three to a team. This was scheduled to take place at Bexhill, but because of bad weather conditions was transferred to Eastbourne where the race took place in Force 6 south west winds. Hastings Sailing Club won.

At about this time we raced regularly against Dover College, home and away.

The Harry Masters Cup now appeared in the racing calendar. This was a series of races held in Fireflies between us and the Royal Cinque Ports Dover Sailing Club and Folkestone Sailing Club. We hosted the first race in 1955 which we won, but it was three years before we won again. Racing alternated between all three clubs and continued until 1963.

Inter-club team races were a regular fixture and Fireflies and GP 14's were used in racing against Eastbourne Sailing Club, Albacores against Brighton Sailing Club and Thorpe Bay, and 12ft Nationals and Enterprises against Pevensey Bay Sailing Club.

There was a knock out competition between Bexhill, Hastings, Pevensey Bay and Eastbourne and in 1961 we made 14 boats available (two in reserve) for team racing and clubs were distinguished by different coloured streamers.

We entered a team against Welsh Harp Sailing Club in GP 14's. We also team-raced against RAF Wartling in Albacores.

There was a team race in near gale force

conditions at Portsmouth which had to be abandoned after most boats had capsized.

The Cadets raced against Pevensey Bay during the school holidays.

In 1969, we staged an inter-club team race against Pevensey Bay and Hastings Sailing Clubs with 12 Fireflies and 9 Scorpions (which were now establishing themselves) being made available.

The Scorpion South East Area Association asked Bexhill to arrange inter-club team races in Scorpions. In 1970, the Southern Division of the Scorpion Class team race was held at Seaford and the Bexhill A Team including Keith Jerkins, Mike Adams and Graham Carruthers competing in an entry of 12 teams, won.

The RYA started promoting its first competition, a National inter-club team race championship in 1969. It was open to all yachtsmen from the 1400 recognised clubs with a total membership of 400,000. The competition was run on a knock out series with the first three rounds being sailed off in areas, we being in the

South East area. Clubs had to be prepared to offer 6 boats of a Class and be prepared to travel. We entered one team of three crews using Fireflies and were drawn at home to Chipstead Sailing Club that year, but we did not progress any further. The next year we drew a bye in Round 1. We raced away at Arun in Round 2 in Albacores and won. The third round was against Hoo Ness at home in Fireflies and we were again successful. The area semi finals and finals were held at Sussex Motor Yacht Club at Shoreham in Merlin Rockets and the competing teams were Sussex Motor Yacht Club versus Chipstead Sailing Club and Whitstable Sailing Club versus Bexhill Sailing Club. Whitstable beat us and went on to the finals. Sussex MYC beat Whitstable SC to become the South East area finalist. Our team included Keith Jerkins, Tony Williams, Mike Adams, Chris Fagg, James Thompson and Charles Couldrick.. Our RYA team manager/captain was John Baber, who naturally took part when racing was in Fireflies, but picked the best appropriate team when a different class of

1958

The starting cannon presented by Mr C. I. Meads in memory of Col. Charles, the club secretary from 1952 – 1956 was fired for the first time by Mrs Charles in October.

boat was used. Had the finals been held in Scorpions, the result could well have been very different!

The following year we again entered one team and were drawn against Silver Wings Sailing Club away in Round 1. Here is an extract from the Sailing Committee Minutes dated 7th May:- "RYA Team Race – the committee observed one minute's

silence on being informed that BSC team had been eliminated in Round 1"

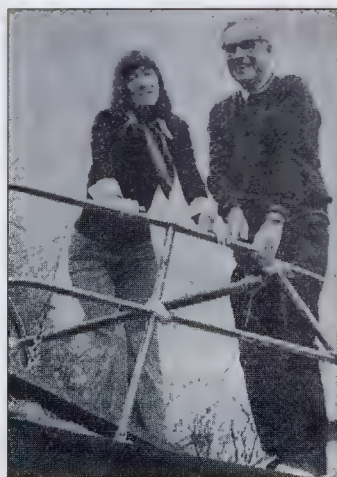
We continued competing in all team races under John Baber's management until 1974 when we had to withdraw mainly because of problems concerning insurance resulting from the occasional damage to boats and Members' reluctance to loan out their boats.

A dream come true

GEOFF Larkby (whose exploits appear elsewhere in this book) for five years, mainly at weekends, had been quietly working away at building a Yachting World Peoples Boat in his back garden at Collington Lane East. She was a Bermudan rigged 3 berth yacht of five tons. The boat was constructed, to start with, upside down suspended from scaffolding towers until the keel had been placed in position. She was subsequently righted by only three people, such was Geoff's ingenuity. Marine ply was glued throughout. Gunmetal screws were used, not brass, to last in salt water. The mast and rigging were stainless steel and the mast was designed to step down easily. The sails were terylene 220 square feet and they were about the only item not made by Geoff. He even cast and fitted the keel himself. In addition to the boat, Geoff made a trailer to transport the boat to the beach at the Sailing Club site. The yacht was launched on 18th June 1960 and christened *Millemach* (one thousandth part of the speed of sound at sea level) by his daughter, Pauline. The boat floated off the beach and was anchored overnight to await the tide for her maiden voyage to Rye where she was berthed.

Not very long after this Geoff had grander designs and started work on his next boat, also at his home. This boat took ten years to build and is a 30ft 8 ton Sea Witch class boat. The interior was to Geoff's personal specifications. The seven berths were reduced to four for uncramped comfort and there is central heating. Eventually, in 1975, there was a champagne

christening party at Collington Lane East and the boat was transported by road to Strand Quay at Rye for the launch and Geoff's daughter Pauline Dearing named the boat *Patcha*. The mast could be easily lowered as with *Millemach* and this enabled Geoff to sail and motor through the rivers and canals of France to the Mediterranean coast where the boat is now berthed with Geoff living on board, summer and winter, and thoroughly enjoying his retirement – being known locally as 'cet fou Anglais'!



Our rescue boats...

...from the days of 'hired help' to modern fast-response capability

FOR the first few years of the Club's existence we did not own our own rescue boat. Mr Russell made his motor fishing boat, which was berthed at our sailing site, available and some club members were motor boat owners and they operated a rota system to provide rescue facilities. We also hired motor boats from willing fishermen or other locals and it cost us about £60 annually.

At first the motor boats were held in readiness ashore and often had great difficulty getting afloat when needed.

It was, of course, essential to have our own facilities and in 1950 it was decided to have a boat to a design by Morgan Giles, the noted marine designer, and it was built locally by 'Eddie' Edwards at Bernard Noakes' boatyard. She was 16ft long, weighed 15cwt and was clinker built of lifeboat design with a canoe stern and not much freeboard. She was a good sea boat and quite fast. An appeal was sent out to help pay for her and a 'Ship-Halfpenny' fund was launched by Capt F.C. Crosse. Some old style halfpennies had a picture of a sailing ship on their obverse. This was of course pre-decimalisation. The boat cost £450. She was launched with all due ceremony on 26th May 1951 by the Mayoress, Mrs Goodwin, and named *F.C. Crosse* after our first Commodore. It was not long

before she was called upon to perform rescue duties and in fact, because of the many capsize that seemed to occur then, we were known in some circles as the Bexhill Sinking Club! The inboard petrol engine was the weak link with the magneto and the electrics proving to be unreliable. Conversion to diesel was not possible as adequate bearings could not be fitted. The engine was reconditioned and eventually replaced by a Stuart

Turner 8 HP 2-stroke engine installed by Pragnell of Eastbourne.

It is, perhaps, appropriate to record the following happening to illustrate the importance of having a good reliable rescue boat. The Club prides itself on its safety arrangements and self-sufficiency on the water.

The last thing it ever wants to

do is to call on the RNLI, but in 1961 an incident arose when it all nearly went horribly wrong.

The Albacore *Wanton* capsized twice two miles off shore during a race as did a *Firefly* in rather testing conditions. The first time, the crew of three righted the boat successfully but after the second time, the rescue boat picked up Bill Beer, the Vice Commodore, who was completely exhausted, while the crew Mr Sheridan and Mr Skelton remained with the dinghy. Our rescue boat then broke down before she could complete the second trip and the two crewmen were in the water for two hours before being rescued by Mr Thorpe of East Hastings Angling Club and landed at Hastings. A call was put out to the RNLI Hastings Lifeboat but they were already on a call to Fairlight.

By the time they reached *Wanton* the crew had been picked up so the lifeboat took the Albacore, which had been abandoned, in tow to Hastings.

1967

A 35ft catamaran, the "Mininara" with four people on board capsized at 1800 hours off South Cliff en route from Dover to Newhaven. The Hastings Lifeboat and Inshore Rescueboat attended. There were no casualties apart from the Lifeboat which was holed during the operation.



Pick up. This boat can now be seen in Adrian Alpine's back garden. Like old soldiers our old rescue boats simply fade away.



Fast and manoeuvrable the ribs in use today provide a rapid response to calls for help.

Two other fishermen set out from Glyne Gap in their outboard motor boat but experienced difficulties with the rough seas and arrived after the crew had been picked up. It was a very worrying time but happily ended well. This event no doubt influenced our decision to sell *F.C. Crosse* to a club member, Mr Gordon Davis, who took her to Cornwall where she could be seen next to the Helford River estuary in Gillan Creek.

The *F.W. Crosse* was replaced in 1962 by a smaller open boat with outboard engine and launched on 16th June when she was named *Pick Up*. Her main disadvantage were her high slab sides of the hard chine design which resulted in excessive windage and made her very difficult to steer especially at slow speeds.

At about this time the club picked up an old Shearwater catamaran hull for £10. The rear beam was strengthened and an outboard engine fitted, and this proved to be a very quick response boat albeit extremely wet. She was named *Katastrophe*.

Eastbourne SC had recently bought a modified fishing boat from Lower of Newhaven. The Lower family had been building fishing craft for generations of fishermen and had evolved a distinctive design. The sides were too high for rescue work but the reduction of the freeboard by three strakes still left a very seaworthy craft and

the Executive Committee decided to order a similar boat. Members of the Sub Committee went over to Newhaven from time to time to monitor progress on the construction. Father, two sons and a daughter comprised the workforce. As far as could be seen there were no plans but the workmanship was marvellous the family working together as a team. The engine was a 2-cylinder 8½ HP Lister diesel and this combination served us faithfully for 25 years. She was launched in 1965 and named *Stand-By* by Pip Clare. We added to our rescue facilities in 1977 with the first inflatable, *Triton*.

Eastbourne, Hastings and Pevensey Sailing Clubs and we have always helped each other with rescue arrangements as needed and we have regularly supplied at least one rescue boat for the Royal Sovereign Race. The weather was so bad in 1988 that the race had to be cancelled and even an attempt at a smaller inshore race had to be abandoned. No rescue boats were allowed back ashore at Eastbourne due to the very rough conditions but were instructed to stand off and await an abatement in weather conditions. However, on advice that conditions were not as bad at Bexhill, Eastbourne officials 'released' *Stand-By* and she was sailed back across stormy Pevensey Bay, at reduced speed, by Ken Hancock



Phoenix.

and Duncan Feathers. The surf was very bad at Bexhill and the attempted landing ended in disaster. The boat was swung round broadside in the waves, broached and dashed violently on to the beach. Duncan leapt from the boat and was half way up the beach before she came to rest.

Ken, as Captain, felt it his duty to remain with the sinking ship, and was dragged out of the wreck minus his specs by many helping hands. The boat was so badly damaged that she was declared a write-off.

She was eventually replaced by a Fisherboat 19ft with an 18 HP inboard diesel and a folding cuddy which afforded some weather protection. She makes a very good Committee boat. There was a competition amongst members for a name and from a list of about 50 names *Phoenix* was chosen.

A large very roomy inflatable from Winceby House was bought and proved extremely useful and versatile for several years until she perished beyond repair. It was about that time the RNLI type rigid inflatables were being introduced and we now have two of these.

Oil...

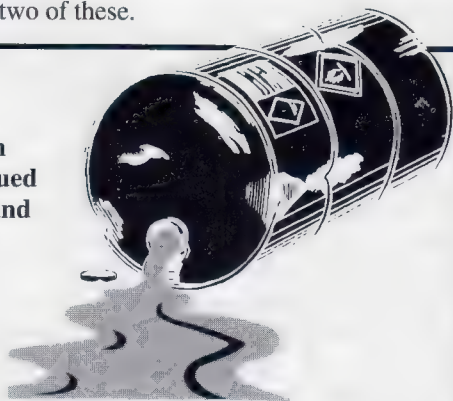
THROUGHOUT most of the 1960's we, in common with many coastal areas around Britain, were plagued by oil pollution. Apart from killing sea birds, fish and sea life, this stuff impregnated sails, clothing and footwear, and if brought into the Club accidentally was spread everywhere. It was also not easy to dispose of and clean up.

A lot of the time it was only an insidious sheen on the surface of the water but still just as damaging as was the semi- solidified oil buried just under the surface of the beach.

Just as the sailing season was starting in April 1965 there was a collision, in thick fog, of two oil tankers off Beachy Head which resulted in an oil slick 7 miles x $\frac{3}{4}$ mile in area threatening the beaches from Eastbourne to Hastings. Most of it was, thankfully, dispersed by the Royal Navy so little oil came ashore.

There were two bad instances of oil pollution in 1967. The first was in May when a large oil slick washed ashore at Bexhill including the Club beach. It cost £1,400 to clear up. The culprit was not positively identified but it was thought that it probably came from the Torrey Canyon disaster. The second was another bad case in August when more oil washed up on our beach and many sea birds were soaked and died. This incident coincided with Sea Week and, because of it, racing had to be cancelled on Thursday. It was not much fun launching boats into a pool of oil.

Another spill in 1969 gave us cause for concern when the tanker *Sitakund* was wrecked off Eastbourne. Luckily on this occasion there was little oil damage, most of it being dispersed by action of the sea and weather.



Communications...

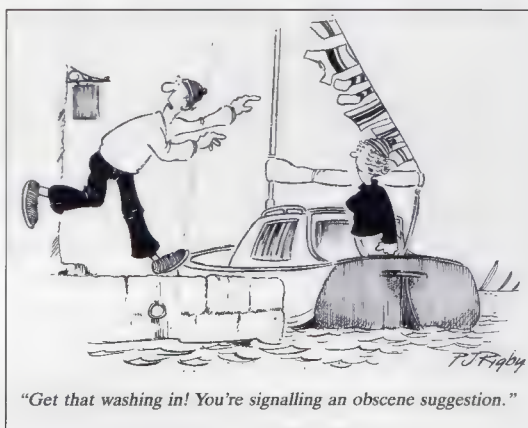
...how to get the message
across, using all means imaginable

WE have not always had the luxury of radio communication between ship and shore. To start with it was just shouted messages with much gesticulations.

We have, of course, always followed the International Code flag signalling system for racing signals.

We did consider the use of a Very pistol for signalling from the rescue boat but this would have required a licence and was not followed up. However, we then installed an Aldis Lamp in the Starters Box which, together with red and green gelatine filters, proved to be extremely versatile as can be seen from these signals used from the Club to the rescue boat.

This may seem very crude by present day standards but in fact it covered 99 per cent of our



needs and there was virtually nothing to go wrong – unlike some electronics – and it was not subject to any interference from neighbouring Clubs or

SYSTEM 1 – For laying the course

White short flashes	Call signal
White continuous	Cancel my last signal
Red continuous	The mark should be laid further to the East
Green continuous	The mark should be laid further to the West
Red short flashes	The mark should be laid further offshore
Green short flashes	The mark should be laid further inshore
White long flashes	You are on station drop the mark where you are
Green/Red alternating flashes	Course laid. Now changing to Signal System 2

SYSTEM 2 – During racing

White short flashes	Call signal
White alternating long/short flashes	Re-lay drifted distance mark
White long flashes	Your signal for assistance has been observed and help is being organised
White continuous	Cancel my last signal
Red/Green alternating flashes	Come inshore for instructions
Red	Capsize observed East of Club
Red continuous	Inner part of course
Red flashing	Outer part of course
Green	Capsize observed West of Club
Green continuous	Inner part of course
Green flashing	Outer part of course
Red/White alternating flashes	Re-lay drifted mark East of Club
Green/White alternating flashes	Re-lay drifted mark West of Club

Receipt of all signals to be acknowledged by waving a yellow flag.

fishermen. The Aldis lamp was designed for use with Morse Code (but who knows the Morse Code these days?) With the advent of radios the Aldis lamp was eventually sold in a Club Jumble Sale to Dick Rowsell of the local Coastguard Service.

It was not until 1962 that we first started experimenting with radios, originally with walkie-talkie sets. This was when certain bands of the air waves were being opened up to bodies such as sailing clubs under strict control and regulation. The first two-way radio we bought, having unsuccessfully applied to the Ministry of Education and Science for a Grant, was the Storno but the sets were not waterproofed and were unreliable with salt water corrosion. They were replaced in 1969 with Cossors which worked well.

A couple of years later John Brockhurst managed to acquire a Pye radio-transceiver from the Ambulance Service which the Club bought at a favourable price. It was installed in the Starters Box

with its own aerial and is still in use to this day.

The rigid inflatable rescue boats both have their own radios in waterproof boxes and are multi-channel – which means that they can be worked with anyone who uses the sea, although for Club use we are restricted to Channel 37. This Channel has been reserved specifically for sailing clubs but unfortunately local fishermen make a great deal of use of it too.

Phoenix, our Committee boat/reserve boat, has a single channel waterproof radio.

The other original radio is now used by the winch operator to maintain contact with the rescue boats when winching them in, as visibility is so restricted with the high shingle bank.

We also have two hand-held 12 channel radios in waterproof bags as back up when needed on land or at sea.

This all adds up to a total of seven radios in use by the Club.

The Clubhouse under attack!

THE Clubhouse has, unfortunately, been broken into on several occasions. Here is an account of the first one in 1972.

Extract from the Bexhill Observer:- “Bexhill Sailing Club members were shocked when entering their elegant club premises at the weekend to find the place in chaos. There was blood, smashed glass, broken eggs and worse scattered about, the aftermath of an act of reckless vandalism. An experienced detective described the scene as disgusting and a terrible mess. Cupboards had been smashed open and their contents scattered about the floor. Several bottles of spirits, cigars and cigarettes were taken. Also a two-way short wave radio and the original Carousel Trophy, a silver model of the club house. Bexhill police asked for the public's help in finding a thief with a badly cut hand. The intruder smashed one of the large glass windows to the balcony and apparently cut himself. Detectives found a rubber glove obviously split during the operation and quantities of blood splashed over the floor and furniture. An anchor was used as a weapon. An indication of the timing of the raid was that the barograph had been smashed and had stopped at 2.30 am. One unfortunate aftermath of this affair was the complete lack of security which occurred as the thieves made off with the complete stock of club keys to front door, beach door, lounge, bar store etc. All locks had to be changed and everyone issued with new keys. Later, Club Commodore Peter Cole praised members for their hard work in getting the club back in order in time for the weekend racing programme.”

Later two men were arrested and most of the property recovered. At their trial, two men were sentenced for breaking into the Sailing Club. An 18 year old was given two years probation and a 20 year old man sent to a detention centre. The Judge said “there is no point in loading you up with fines you cannot pay”.

However, no place could be found at a detention centre so he was placed on probation for two years!

Fundraising...

...or how you have enjoyed parting with your cash over the years

LIKE most clubs Bexhill Sailing Club has always been on the lookout for extra money to supplement its income from subscriptions and entrance fees etc, and many people have contributed much time and energy in this direction. From the very beginning, Whist and Bridge Drives and many raffles were held. From time to time, jumble sales were held, usually at the Guides' Headquarters in London Road. This involved a lot of tiring and dusty work but we never seemed to lack volunteers. On one occasion in 1955, 200 people were admitted in the first 15 minutes and a net profit of £62 was made.

Various ways of raising money for the new clubhouse were used. Although we had obtained a grant for part of the cost there was still a shortfall of some £4,000 which we had to find. One very successful scheme 'The Tote' was organised by Gordon Viner, later handed over to Hector Green. Over the years it was run until the account was closed in 1965, £1,000 was raised.

A fruit machine was installed in spite of some members' reservations. Its use was restricted by a Club Bye-Law which prohibited the use of the fruit machine by young persons under the age of 16. There was an enigmatic entry in the Club membership handbook in the first year of its installation of a certain 'O.A. Bandit Esq' The machine did help supplement club funds but eventually the novelty wore off and when the Tax take was increased it was decided to discontinue with it.

Geoff Reynolds then got his 'Snowball Raffle' off the ground, This was a big commitment on his part as the raffle was drawn weekly on Saturday

evenings with the added idea of encouraging members to use the Club more. You had to be present to win, otherwise the prize was rolled over to the next time – shades of the Lottery. This brought in welcome added revenue for over a year but was closed down in 1969.

Apart from our own needs, the Club has also supported various charities – RNLI, Deep Sea Fishermen Fund, King George V Fund and the Mayoress' charity – by running special races and making a donation of the entry fees. We also contributed to the 1968 RYA Olympic Fund Appeal via a Nautical Quiz answered by Keith Musto and Derek Farrant (of Olympic and 5-0-5 world fame). This was open to Club members and those of the East Sussex Sailing Clubs.

Many professions are represented in our membership and on two occasions we were fortunate to call on the services of Geoff Madeley and Rodney

Gadsden, in their capacity as Auctioneers, to raise money for club funds, to give members a chance to donate objects for which they no longer had any use and for other members to buy even if, on some occasions, after perhaps too many pints of beer, they were not entirely sure what they were bidding for!

The Bexhill Prize Draw has been in existence for some years now and was the brainchild of Richard Eagleton. This has supplied a regular extra income to Club Funds with half of the takings, approximately £600 every year, going to the Club and half, another £600, to prizes. Over the years David Stedman, Colin Crate and John Bournes and, at present, 'Dusty' Miller have run the organisation.

1965

Now that the new clubhouse was up and running, it meant a big increase in applications for membership (there was a sudden interest in the pleasant, well situated property). If this influx was allowed unchecked it could have altered the characteristics of the club, so for one year membership was restricted to boat owners and sailing members only with some applications having to be deferred. Also the Provisional Membership category was introduced. Membership now topped 400.

The Royal Sovereign...

... protection for shipping and an irresistible lure for the dinghy sailor

THE Royal Sovereign reef is named after the warship which went aground there in 1757. These dangerous shoals are only 6ft below water at low water springs and were marked by the old lightship since 1875, except for the war years when she was replaced by buoys. There were 115 air attacks on lightships around the coast during the last war. A lightship used to remain on station for three years before undergoing maintenance.

1951 was the year of the first Royal Sovereign Race organised by Eastbourne Sailing Club, a very ambitious thing to do especially in those early years with the lightship being the turning mark 7 miles offshore. It is now a popular and well established race which has been held every year since – weather permitting. In that first race the first four boats were from Bexhill!

Charles Taylor M.P., our President at the time, donated a Trophy, a silver-framed photograph of his six metre yacht *Blue Cat* with an enamelled replica of the Club burgee set on the frame, for the first Bexhill boat.

After carrying out studies on permanent structures on the sea bed, Trinity House made test borings at the Sovereign site in 1965. Not long after, plans for the Royal Sovereign Tower to replace the lightship were announced. Work on the new structure started in 1967 by a Danish construction firm. The cabin section was made separately from the base and central column and both were built in excavated berths at Newhaven. However, southerly gales and the highest tide for 60 years breached the basin at Newhaven and it took three months to clean up and restore operations. Then it was discovered that the sea bed at the final site was covered in large boulders which had to be cleared.

The lightship was finally towed away to Harwich in 1970 and replaced by four lit buoys. In June of that year the vast concrete caisson base measuring 120 feet square x 16ft deep and surmounted by a large telescopic column, was floated out and carefully towed into position by a Dutch tug. The base was then flooded and sunk into position by an



From 1875 to 1970 a lightship and it's crew stood guard over the dangerous reef. This service of almost 100 years was broken only during the war years.

The Sovereign Tower is an impressive sight, especially viewed from a small dinghy. It is now a fully automated, solar powered station.

ingenious system of large polythene bags filled with sand in hollow compartments of the caisson and a fine balance was obtained so that the structure settled on an even keel.

It was then planned to tow the cabin section, weighing 1,500 tons, out on two pontoons, site it over the central column, and on a falling tide locate and fix it in position. The inner part of the column would be jacked up by powerful hydraulic rams raising the cabin to its final position 50ft above high water. However, suitable weather coinciding with the right tidal conditions for the assembly of the two sections proved to be most elusive. So the cabin section remained marooned in its little lagoon at Newhaven for some time until it was decided to tow it to Portsmouth from where it would be easier to tow at short notice.

It was not until May 1971 that the cabin section, after having to turn back because of bad weather on the first attempt, finally left Portsmouth and was successfully assembled in position on the base.

The structure is of reinforced concrete with a design life of 50 years and is built to withstand breaking waves 50ft high and winds of 110 knots – conditions only expected once every 500 years in the English Channel. The Royal Sovereign Light Tower was the first tower structure to be built. The tower stands 36 metres high and is topped by crew quarters, each member having his own berth, rest rooms, store rooms and engine room and with a 66 square feet heli-pad and the light housing itself offset. The crew comprised four men with three on duty and one off duty spending 2 months at sea with one month off.

The light is 2½ million candle power, white, flashing once every 20 seconds and having 12 miles visibility. The air horn diaphone, much a characteristic of Bexhill in bad weather and affectionately known as 'Moaning Minnie', sounded its distinctive mournful double note twice every minute. There was also a now discontinued VHF radio beacon and a radio telephone link with Dungeness.

In 1994, the Tower became fully automated and



the keepers were finally flown ashore by helicopter on Friday 13th May. Arrays of solar modules are mounted on stainless steel frames at an angle of 65 degrees on the South side of the tower and it is the sun's rays which now provide the power for the light and electric fog signal with fog detector. All equipment has back-up and stand-by arrangements. The station is monitored via a telemetry link to Trinity House operational control centre at Harwich, which is manned 24 hours per day.

Trinity House operates 68 lighthouses most of which have now been converted to automatic operation. Its services are funded by light dues levied on vessels calling at U.K. ports

Royal Sovereign was one of the coastal stations used by the Met Office in their broadcast shipping forecasts. This has now been replaced by 'Greenwich Light Vessel', an automatic station in the English Channel to the West of the Royal Sovereign Tower.

The Beach Site...

ON the whole the beach site has, to date, been a good one from the point of view of danger from the sea. There have been a number of occasions when Spring tides coincided with south to south-east gales causing excessively high water. The clubhouse itself has been flooded on a number of occasions mainly through the ground floor sliding doors, but structural storm damage has been remarkably light (touch wood!). Damage to the extensive glazing has mainly been caused by vandals and not by the action of the sea.

One or two 'near misses' should be recorded. During one particularly severe storm a dead whale was washed ashore. Such was the strength of the waves that the corpse was thrown about as though it was made of a piece of light timber. Fortunately for the clubhouse, the corpse was lifted and smashed ashore a little further to the East. One wave earlier and it is likely that the sheer weight of the dead whale would have destroyed the structure of the building. It was amusing to imagine the reaction of the Insurance Assessor to read that the Bexhill Sailing Club had been destroyed by a whale!

The concrete apron to the East of the club was laid by Ken Draper and his helpers in 1970. Almost before the concrete was dry, boats and trailers were being left there inconsiderately. So John Wakeford painted large white letters 'KEEP OFF'.

There was alarm at one stage when the appointed sea defence engineers for the whole of Bexhill sea front, which entailed installing 52 extra groyne at a cost of £6 million, decided that a groyne should bisect the clubhouse beach from a point at the south-east corner of the building straight down to



Groyne construction in progress. Note the Marina Court in the background the site of which is now part of the De La Warr car park.

the sand. Much protest from many quarters eventually persuaded the authorities to site the new groyne where they are today, the west 'cranked' groyne being the best compromise the engineers could agree. In hindsight the revised layout has caused little or no inconvenience although the two marker piles in the sea have been more of an obstruction to sea room than some

helms may have wished and have even been known to possess a certain fatal magnetic attraction to our rescue boat.

Because of severe beach erosion, before the building of these new groyne, the Club had been granted an extra 30ft of beach for the boat park. But a request to

renew this for the coming year was rejected by the Council because most of the beach had now returned.

The sand and rocks at the bottom of the beach increases and decreases with the vagaries of the tide. Some of the more prominent rocks have been scraped level and generally, for most seasons, there has been little or no trouble although some black sticky mud pools still persist at low tide. The off-

1959

Mr Wally Ball and his father took Skylark, one of three boats used for pleasure trips at Bexhill, to Rye because it leaked too badly to be repaired. They had to bale hard nearing Rye and just made it to the harbour where the boat sank under them.

shore reef seems to remain more or less stable and members know the safe passage through and around, although a few would admit to damaged centreboards.

However, the old Glynde Hall Hotel which stood at the bottom of Sea Road was demolished in 1971 to make way for the present block of flats. This caused some sailors a certain amount of consternation because the letter 'N' in the hotel's name had been used as a transit mark when approaching the shore to assist in finding the gap through the reef.

Extremely high tides and severe gales have exposed the old wartime tank traps which had

remained completely covered and were in fact unknown to many people. It was also in the sand and soft rocks on the beach immediately to the west of our site that a dinosaur footprint was discovered. The underwater rocks at Galley Hill were blasted by the Council to enable the Sea Angling Club to beach their boats more safely at all states of the tide.

Parking of boats on the beach has taken many patterns over the years and has been the responsibility of the Beachmaster. Special storage has been provided for sailboards and a rack was built under the supervision of John Bournes and Ray Dixon by members to house the Toppers.

Maintenance of the Clubhouse

WHENEVER possible, it has been the wish of Members to undertake the average run of maintenance repairs. Indeed there have been a number of occasions when even the external re-painting has been carried out on a DIY basis.

However major works have had to be undertaken professionally. The flat roofing was renewed after about 25 years service and there have been a number of upgrades to the electrical wiring system – particularly to accommodate new equipment, culminating in a complete rewire in 1995. We also had to instal a burglar alarm system against theft from the Bar Store and Bar Storage Room (the old Secretary's Office). The present Bar is protected by a grille.

During the regatta weekend of the summer of 1981 disaster struck during the Saturday evening dance. Because of the warm evening, many people were getting fresh air outside on the balcony. The balcony was cantilevered from the main timber structure and concealed decay due to water percolation had so weakened the timber beams at their point of cantilever that there was sudden movement to the balcony – downwards. Fortunately everybody realised what was happening and dashed inside thus averting what could easily have been a major human disaster. Fortunately the plate glass sliding doors remained in situ. Needless to say, the clubhouse was immediately cleared and the upper floor closed. An urgent call was made to Peter Cole who responded at once with Acrow props and he installed temporary supports.

As a result of this tragedy, our Professional Timber Engineer Consultant was called in to make a thorough survey and report to the Executive Committee. Such was the decay that he recommended a system of galvanised steel columns and joists be installed and these can be seen by anyone visiting the clubhouse. Tenders were sought after long deliberations and besides the major structural renewals, the Starters Box Unit and the external staircase were also included for major repair or renewal. Llewellyns of Hastings won the contract and their Final Account finished up at just under £12,500 which included £735 VAT

The repairs took place from February 1982 and were completed satisfactorily the following May in time for the new Season. This was a worrying time for all of us, but money had always been set aside by the Treasurer every year against clubhouse repairs and a healthy sum had built up. This was virtually demolished. It was technically interesting to note how far the wet rot decay had penetrated completely invisible timbers and proved the hazards of trying to keep out driving rain (probably hitting the building at anything up to 60 miles per hour) in gale conditions. Constant vigilance is required against future troubles and for that purpose a Fabrics Sub Committee was set up to make regular inspections and to make sure that urgent work was carried out the moment anything amiss was spotted.

The Carousel...

... everything from calms to calamity

THE Sailing Club's 21st Anniversary in 1968 was marked by a party with a cake cutting ceremony by the Mayor and Mayoress, Councillor and Mrs E.T. Johnson, an exhibition of memorabilia and photographs and a new, completely different race, The Carousel.

This was a six hour pursuit race with boats sailing with crews in accordance with their Class rules, but being required to supply a similar duplicate crew. They had to race continuously round a course but had to come ashore to change crews completely four times during the race. The winners were the teams to complete the most laps, and they collected the Carousel Trophy, a particularly fine silver miniature model of the Clubhouse which was made by a member, Ron Kell. The trophy has since been presented to Lois Harrison in memory of her husband, Roy, who was the architect of the Club. A glass decanter with a silver chain donated by Freddie Clare and Robin Blake, Past President and Vice President, replaces this.

The first Carousel was sailed in bright sunshine with a steady North-Easterly breeze Force 2 – 3 increasing later in the day. The first starting gun went at 10.52 for the slowest boat, but the fastest boat, a Shearwater Catamaran did not start until 12.37 and the finishing gun was not until 17.00. The winners on this occasion was 5-0-5 *Miss Six* sailed by the Farrant Brothers, ex 5-0-5 world champions, and the Wilson Brothers from Hastings Sailing Club who appropriately completed 21 laps.

However, the slowest and first boat to start was an International Moth from Medway Sailing Club *Magic Moth*. It was only when the wind increased in the last half hour that the Moth was overtaken by the 5-0-5 with her greater sail area, but the two visitors from Medway were to be congratulated on their sterling performance, racing hard for 6 hours on the open sea.

The Carousel is based upon the The Royal Cinque Ports Yacht Club Dover race – the 'Courroie Sans Fin' in which Ken Hancock and Roger Edgerton took part with their crews in Roger's Swift Catamaran *Skubidu*. Their start was just after 10.00 and winds of Force 5-6 persisted throughout the day until early evening lightening to Force 1-2. They worked their way through the fleet of some 60 craft until they were lying third at teatime. The light conditions prevented them from improving on this and they were unable to beat the two Albacores from Herne Bay Sailing Club when the race finished at 19.00. Their final result was third overall and first in their Class.

The Dover race is held in the harbour with the protection of the harbour wall and a limited rise and fall of tide. At Bexhill we have an exposed open shoreline and considerable tidal rise and fall to contend with, so the race had to be shortened from Dover's 12 hours and sailed around high water time.

Carousels were held every year from the first one in 1968 until 1980 with the exception of 1978 when

'Evening Gold'

On the wall of the Lounge by the Bar are several pictures and photographs. Amongst these and one of the first to be hung, in 1969, is a lovely print 'Evening Gold'.

Barry Westwood of what was then Southern Television, in his programme 'Day by Day', showed the top ten prints of a competition, one of which was this particular picture. In connection with this showing, viewers were asked to state a reason why he or she would like one of the prints.

This particular print 'Evening Gold' was won by one of our members, Charles Stamp, who gave his reason for wishing to win it that he, somewhat late in life, had joined the Bexhill Sailing Club and that he had been made so welcome, had made so many good friends and had such happiness there, he would like to win it in order to present it to the Club.

And that he did.

Rear Admiral G.H. Carew-Hunt (Admiral Commanding Reserves) on a trip to Bexhill to inspect No 12 Wireless District Royal Naval Reserve training centre in St Leonards Road, also paid us a courtesy visit at the club.



it was blown off. In 1972, the advertised date dawned with gale force winds and the race was postponed until later in the year and was held successfully then. 1970 – 12 out of 25 starters were boats from neighbouring clubs. 1971 – only three minutes separated the first four boats. 1973 – only 8 boats finished with 12 retirements and conditions were approaching ‘survival’ and some damage was done. Bexhill Observer headline read “CAROUSEL CALAMITY” – which was stretching it a bit! 1977 – Only one minute separated the first boat, a Solo, and the second boat an Albacore. 1979 – notable for the highest number of laps sailed – 425 in total. 1980 – Conditions were very rough and only two boats finished, the first being a Mirror *Snoopy* sailed by Roy and Susie Croft and Robin Harris and Tina Verhelly. Second was Scorpion *Liquid Sustenance* sailed by Robert Harrison and Ian Feathers and Alastair Seaton and Carol Viner (Now Mrs Ian Feathers)

Winning boats have included 5-0-5, Scorpion, Firefly, Condor, Solo, Gemini, Mirror, Fireball and Buzz.

Through all those earlier years only minor changes were made to the Carousel. There is always some ‘Sea Lawyer’ around and rules have to be tightened to accommodate him. However, numbers did begin to drop off and interest seemed to be waning. The 1981 Carousel was cancelled because of gales. It was then decided not to run the Carousel from 1982 to 1989, but it was missed by some of the older members of the club; and members joining since 1981 of course had no experience of it and a request was made to revive the race, but to overcome certain difficulties and objections. These were,

understandingly, to obviate the necessity to allow your boat to be raced by someone else, to eliminate crew changes, reduce the length of the race as it could be too exhausting but to try to maintain a certain amount of spectator interest. The thing that put people off more than any other was having to come ashore and relaunch without outside assistance as it is in the surf when most damage is done. So the new Carousel Mark 2 was born. It was still run as a pursuit race but the duration shortened to 4-5 hours. It was left optional whether to change crews or not, the original team could sail the whole race if it was their wish. Boats had to come ashore three times for compulsory rest stops, the decision as to when to come ashore resting with the competitor, and outside assistance was permitted. Also the race was split into Fast and Slow dinghy handicap and Catamarans, the start times being worked out for the three classes separately so that all boats, Fast and Slow, raced for the same sort of time. There were in effect three races going on at the same time.

As all boats still raced on the same course an Overall Winner could be declared on a completed lap average corrected time system. The first Mark 2 Carousel raced in 1990 was won by Nick Jerkins and his crews. This was a gratifying win for him because his father, Keith, won the Carousel in 1970, 1972 and 1975. Keith also finished second in 1979 with young Nick as his crew. Just to prove that this was no fluke, Nick won again in 1991.

Eventually, after organising this race for 20-odd years (and it does entail a lot of work) Ken Hancock decided to say ‘enough is enough’ and handed it all over to Robert Crozier in 1996 whose first race had to be abandoned due to a complete lack of wind.

Sail Training...

...encouraging young and old in good seamanship and knowledge and love of the sea

FROM the very early days the Club faced queries from prospective new members regarding sailing tuition. We were not able to help them until 1961 when we could direct them towards a new sailing school which had just opened at Normans Bay.

However, the Club has always taken a keen interest in youngsters and a 'Junior Sailing Club' was formed in 1950, open to young persons between the ages of 10 and 16. Cadet membership was open to those between 16 and 21 years, later reduced to 18 years. A few races were scheduled for Cadets and Juniors. They were under the supervision of Jimmy Shearing originally, and later Eric Gordon and Joan Gatward, and then Roy Harrison and Freddie Clare.

They had lectures on nautical matters during the winter months following which they sat a test for their Club Badges. During the summer they had training afloat.

The Junior Section was disbanded in 1960 and all young persons merged into the Cadet Section open to those aged 14 to 18 years – later reduced to 12 years, or 10 in the case of Family Members. The first Cadet Sub-Committee under the chairmanship of Christopher Clare was formed. He was 'promoted' to the position of Squadron Captain two years later. It was not until 1968 that the Cadet Squadron Captain was given a seat and a vote on the Sailing Committee and the post was renamed 'Cadet Captain' in 1973.

In 1960 the Further Education Department of the East Sussex Education Committee launched a pilot scheme working on a shoestring budget with two old boats and no fixed headquarters for young would-be dinghy sailors. The instructor was Mr Gordon Beard. A year later, the Outdoor Pursuits Centre, as it was known, was operating from a site at Wallers Haven where initial sailing instruction took place, progressing to Normans Bay for the more advanced training. This was a local authority sailing club, possibly the first of its kind in the country. They

now had seven 12ft dinghies, one Enterprise and a rowing dinghy and a motor boat for rescue purposes. In 1969 there was a waiting list for people wanting to join and all youngsters between 14 and 21, resident in East Sussex were eligible. It was hoped to incorporate the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and RYA recognition was sought.

A course was run for Cadets free and their first dinghy was built by the youngsters at Hailsham County Secondary School from a kit. Other dinghies were renovated during the winter evenings at Evening Institute classes and some boys from the Bexhill Grammar School reached 'Gold Standard'.

Many local schools now wished to include sailing as a school activity and they were led by Tom Meekings and Dennis Saunders and boys from the County Grammar School for Boys in 1964. They had two Graduates which the Club allowed them to keep in the boat park. Shortly after the Grammar School, the Downs

Secondary School for boys under Dennis Brooke joined them with their two Cadet dinghies. Other schools to be allowed to the use of our facilities were Harewood School under Joan Gatward and Pendragon Boys School.

We operated a block membership scheme for the schools on the same lines as was used for the R.A.F. Wartling section. It should be stressed that the Club was in no way responsible, we only provided the facilities.

In 1969 the RYA started their scheme for National Proficiency Certificates issued to individuals who had been trained by clubs approved by the RYA, to normal or advanced grade.

In 1974 Adrian Alpine took a post at Ancaster House Girls School. As part of his duties he was requested to repair their two Mirror dinghies and deliver them to Bexhill Sailing Club and subsequently give instruction to the sixth form girls (in sailing). Adrian quickly became our most active

1964

This was the year when the first of the Le Mans Races was organised by Jack Adams, where competitors line up at the top of the beach and on the 'off' race down to their boats at the water's edge, jump in and sail off.

non member, testing the dinghies, as he put it. Not unreasonably it was suggested that he join the Club. Members from that era will remember all too clearly the interrogation techniques of the membership secretary Robin Blake, although it was not official Club policy you were lucky to get in if you were not a boat owner, a bona fide crew or a friend of John Baber. It was also expected that you would be able to sail and many were "dispatched" to Normans Bay to learn the ropes under the keen eye of Gordon Beard who had a reputation for reducing many a poor woman (and man) to tears, but that was when men were men and litigation had not been invented.

Adrian like many good sailors was self taught and felt it would be beneficial to follow this route where he met Brian Mewitt and Les Quilty. Adrian and Brian subsequently assisted with tuition at Normans bay and eventually became the first of our now substantial band of qualified instructors.

The sailing school in its current format evolved following a number of chance events. Tony Mead took over the Normans Bay training centre and around 1982 East Sussex County Council decided to sell up and Tony moved to Castle Hill Waters where a number of our members received tuition. These included Terry Phillips and Jim Ingram, both Hastings and St Leonards Sailing Club members at that time. Colin Ash, Ed and Beverley Towner, Keith Veness (junior), Roger Mears, John and Angie Kenning and others whose names have unfortunately been lost with time also undertook their training and some stayed on with Tony to assist with the running of training sessions.

In 1984 Tony Mead tried to go it alone and set up a Training Centre at B.S.C. operating from, but completely independent of Bexhill S.C. His access to the Clubhouse was limited to having use of the beach space and changing facilities only, consequently all debriefing was carried out in the

Normanhurst. Those that were there at the time have fond memories of the debriefing sessions. Colin Ash, the only instructor still in the Club from that period, has maintained his close association with the bar having done sterling duty on the Wine Committee. Tony's summer school was supplemented by evening classes at Hastings College and a good number of armchair sailors were brought into the sport through these winter evening sessions.

Terry Phillips was one of Tony's band of helpers and in 1985 when it became apparent that the venture was not viable to support Tony, Terry took over the mantle of "Principal" on a part time basis to his day time job establishing the Tuesday evening and Saturday morning courses that persist to today.

Terry negotiated on the Clubs behalf and purchased the boats that Tony had brought to Bexhill. The fleet consisted largely of wooden boats requiring considerable maintenance made up of Sonnars, a couple of Penguins, a Pacer and a Wayfarer. It became an annual pilgrimage to take the boats to the barn in Crowhurst for over wintering.

The crocodile of towed boats nearly as grand as the towns carnival procession provided a spectacle for local residents and considerable consternation for the horse riders in the back lanes of Catsfield. Our fleet has grown over the years and we currently have a Mirror, 4/5 pacers all fibreglass one on loan from the Scouts the others all ex Bewl Water, four Toppers, a fibreglass Wayfarer ex Plas Menai, Albacore *Pea Green Boat* kindly donated by Ken Roberts and Tom Carew and *Miracle Too Risky* also donated to the Club by John Taylor. The fleet now basically G.R.P. requires considerably less maintenance and now resides on the beach all year round making it easier to carry out the inevitable repair where unwary pupils have had close encounters with groynes.





How not to launch.

Terry ran the School successfully formalising the current structure in 1989. Although integral to the Club it was seen by most to be The Bexhill Sailing School not quite a full member of the club and there were often undertones of us and them. Being an ambulance driver and an instructor within the service he was able to bring his professional expertise in these areas to the Club, but the friendly style and general informality which is the basis of the schools success is a legacy that he can be proud of.

In 1991 Terry Phillips moved to Devon handing over the position of Principal to Jim Ingram who in the intervening period had transferred from Hastings to Bexhill S.C. Jim developed the structure established by Terry but made a conscious effort to integrate the school into the Club and this has been a further success story with no visible demarcation between school and Club the results

are increased interaction between school and Club members and an increased number of retained members. Jim ran the school for four years handing over in 1995.

The sailing school has proved invaluable in bringing in new members and the requirement of self taught sailors seeking formal instruction also brought Ray and his son Geoff Dixon to the Club in 1986 when they moved from Poole to Hastings. Ray was subsequently coerced to stand for Rear, Vice and then Commodore and is our current sailing school Principal now in his third year, however, this is not the Dixon's main claim to fame!

In 1987 Ray and Geoff like many others before and since stayed to assist with the school. Whilst they were manning one of the rescue boats on a Tuesday evening session Ray a keen ornithologist noted a strange looking bird (feathered) flying out towards them, being mobbed by a following flock

of seagulls. As it flew overhead, being knowledgeable in these things, Ray recognised it instantly as a parrot and the heroic duo set off in hot pursuit with rescue in mind. Like a Battle of Britain pilot the game little parrot was eventually forced to ditch due to the overwhelming odds. When the rescue boat arrived the parrot was already heading for land feet and beak out of the water doing the back stroke for all it was worth. Fearing that it would become waterlogged and sink Ray pulled it from the water only to receive severe lacerations to his index finger which proved that at least the beak was still in full working order. Standard rescue drill is to return all semi drowned personnel to the beach, radioing ashore for assistance. Instructor Ed Towner responded by plunging into the surf to recover the parrot from the rescue boat where it was given full medical assistance by Terry Phillips and was eventually passed on to Terry's brother, a bird fancier (also feathered) to put in his aviary. Sadly the bird did not make a full recovery and died a few days later.

The death led to many recriminations and Ray blamed Ed, an eminent funeral director in Hastings, for trying to stimulate custom for his business. The whole episode received immortality the following Christmas when Terry Phillips and Ed Towner reinacted the famous Monty Python dead parrot sketch at the Clubs annual pantomime. We have been particularly fortunate that a number of members have been prepared not only to give up their time but to incur considerable expense by undertaking formal training.

required for us to run an RYA approved centre to teach and examine dinghy sailing at levels 1,2,3 & 4 together with Power boat courses levels 1,2 & Safety Boat (Although we have instructors who are qualified to teach the Advanced award the Club does not have the necessary navigation equipment nor is the location acceptable to the RYA due to the absence of navigation marks). Currently our Qualified Instructors are Senior Instructors – Gordon Trimmer, Chris Fagg, Dave Milner and Colin Ash. Instructors – Pat Graham, Malcolm Brooks and Elaine Goodman. Although less active in instructing now, other members who are qualified instructors are Adrian Alpine, Brian Mewett Keith

Veness (retired) and Mike Adams. Among others who have given invaluable help to the Sailing School, by manning rescue boats, are John Bournes and Bob Palmer.

Instructors seem particularly vulnerable to mishap and most have fallen foul of unceremoniously decanting themselves from the boats, capsizing when demonstrating a manoeuvre and if they are ever foolish enough to give warnings to others they inevitably suffer the same fate themselves. Roger Mead instructing on a level two course took his gaggle of dinghies on a mini cruise to Galley Hill giving clear warning from the vantage of his rescue boat to avoid the numerous trammel nets and dan buoys that lay in their path advising of the perils on rudders ensnared in mooring lines. His charges successfully found their way through this veritable mine field but Roger was left abandoned with a few hundred yards of netting firmly attached to his propeller.

Outside the sailing season the Club has always provided training usually on a Wednesday evening, which was often a good excuse to open the bar and boost the Club profits. This training was informal covering a

variety of topics which included the IYRU racing rules, this was always good for some heated debate between the more "knowledgeable" members of the Club. O.O.D. training provided the opportunity to create elaborate structures to demonstrate the flag sequences for running a race. Richard Eagleton's superb construction was amongst the most memorable and undoubtedly the forerunner of virtual reality.

We have been fortunate to have had a number of members over the years fully qualified to teach First aid and the evening sessions allowed mixed sexes to roll around the floor under the pretext of resuscitation or placing a patient in the recovery position, Bexhill Sailing Club members have never been short on excuses wherever they needed them. Navigation evenings have developed to the stage where only members with honours degrees are accepted. Les Quilty guides members through the intricacies of secondary ports and tidal diamonds to avoid them being left high and dry when they take to the seas in big boats.

1965

*The Sergeant's Mess RAF
Lyneham Chippenham Wilts who
visited us during Sea Week enjoyed
their stay so much that they
presented us with a shield with their
crest on it in appreciation of their
welcome and assistance received,
as a token of thanks.*

Rescue boat has also been an important aspect of our training over the years run by enthusiastic volunteer members demonstrating how to launch, start and recover the boats, effect a rescue of craft or personnel and the all important protocol of operating the VHF radio. In more recent years as the Club has increased the quality and quantity of its rescue craft we obtained our first qualified Power Boat Instructor – Jim Ingram.

In 1991 Jim set up a series of the RYA Level 2 and level 4 power boat courses and started a programme which is even now taking more and more members through to certificated status. This has become an important area as due to the rising incidents of injury caused by power boat users in general, it is only a matter of time before certification will become mandatory. The RYA revamped the Power Boat structure in 1996 to attune the courses more specifically towards the type of usage that the power boats were applied. Ray Dixon and Gordon Trimmer attained their instructors ticket in the same year together with the new advanced qualification giving them the ability to teach at all levels. Ricky Hooker is following the same route and if more follow then the Club should be well covered for the future.

Our rescue boat fleet has similarly been considerably upgraded. The Fisher 19 with its

reliable inboard diesel provides the perfect mother vessel used as a committee boat supported by the two RIBs with their 30hp outboards. These have proved just as reliable with direct oil injection, electric start and regular use, the unreliability and starting problems are a thing of the past. This mixed fleet of displacement and planing boats are the ideal

combination for powerboat and dinghy instruction and the all important rescue of personnel. Standby our old clinker built rescue boat was an awesome vessel to launch and impractical for the school. Pickup affectionately known as the great

white whale hated by all for the fact that she was completely open, rolled like a pig and subject to windage that made her uncontrollable in all but the lightest of winds, was used extensively by the sailing school as she was an excellent ferry boat. She was also capable of carrying a mass audience when the time came for the students to carry out their capsized recovery drill, although due to her freeboard she was not the easiest boat to get back into after capsizing and recovering a dinghy twice.

In 1997 the School appears to be in good shape handling around 22 pupils on both the Saturday and Tuesday sessions each year. The courses continue to be oversubscribed and our unqualified volunteer helpers are the members that by their actions are doing most to sustain our Club for the next 50 years.

1965

The Town Council, always sympathetic to our various problems provided a special marked out area on the promenade and roadway to facilitate the arrival and departure of boats.



The watch system...

...England and Bexhill Sailing Club expects that every man and woman will do their duty

WATCHES were first introduced to the Club at the beginning of the 1989 Season.

The idea was originally put forward by John Baber at an 'all committee' meeting in the summer of 1988, subsequently discussed by the Sailing and House Committees, recommending the Executive Committee to explore possible implementations. A sub committee consisting of John Baber, Betty Crosse, Bea Tramaseur and David Stedman were appointed and following initial meetings reported that 'watches' were a 'good thing' because of the positive perceived contribution to the club's success including active and close personal management and active role by Watch Leaders, new members being integrated easily, involvement of everyone, creating better club spirit, cross Class integration and smoother running of events with the likelihood of fewer duties being missed.

The Executive Committee at their meeting on the 11th November 1988 unanimously agreed to introduce watches but decreed that no Officer of the Club could be a Watch Leader. The sub committee re-convened for several meetings in which to consider possible Watch Leaders and to ensure a proper mix of membership between the eight watches, to split Classes and correct allocation of boat owners, crews, families etc. After one year the watches were reduced from

eight to six and the appropriate redistribution made to bolster perceived 'weaker' watches to ensure they were as equal as possible. The sailing programme, winter work parties, the Bar duties are all undertaken on a rota basis between the watches, whilst Open meetings, regattas etc are organised by the respective Class Representatives etc from across the whole spectrum of club membership. To ensure the smooth running of the duties allocated, a Watch Leader may hold a meeting, write or telephone asking for volunteers from within the watch and filling the rota by judicial administration, also encouraging and giving support to members when they join. It is not easy to ensure that all duties are filled at all times, but nevertheless Watch Leaders fulfill their role admirably with very few mishaps; a great improvement on previous methods.

In addition, Watch Leaders encourage training of Rescue Boat coxswains, Race Officers etc both within the watch but more generally, when appropriate club courses are taking place.

The introduction of watches has therefore had a profound effect on the club and it is through members' constant awareness and willingness to participate that its success will be felt in order to keep our Club one of the best along the South Coast.

East Sussex Coastal Sailing Federation

THE idea of Sussex coastal sailing clubs getting together for their mutual benefit was first raised in 1952 when the Commodores of 8 clubs along the whole Sussex coast met at Brighton to pursue the idea. It was not until 1966 that Rye Harbour, Hastings and St Leonards, Pevensey Bay, Sovereign, Eastbourne, Newhaven and Seaford sailing clubs, and of course ourselves founded the East Sussex Coastal Sailing Federation to discuss matters of mutual interest. Our own Commodore, Freddie Clare, played a big part in getting this off the ground. There was to be co-operation in our sailing and social programmes and we would act in support of any individual clubs' problems. We also started the Federation Race to be organised in turn by member clubs and the Challenge Trophy to be competed for annually on a club team basis.

Storm force...

FROM time to time the elements remind us of the full force of their fury and the vulnerability of our exposed coastline. The pictures below and opposite show graphically the drama that, from time to time, we witness at Bexhill.



Above: After the hurricane of October 1987 boats were found heaped, like toys, against the promenade wall. Extensive damage was caused throughout the South East but the clubhouse came through relatively unscathed. Below: with a South or South Westerly storm running large, steep waves often pound the shingle shore long after the winds have abated.





Above: August 1992 saw Dennis's beach huts to the east of the clubhouse being swept out to sea. Several club members helped in lifting some of the huts up onto the promenade thus minimising the damage. Below: The following day revealed the extent of the damage with the remains of huts strewn along the beach to the west of the clubhouse.



Championships...

IN 1966 the Club was first approached to put on a championship meeting for the Swift Catamaran Class. Interest in Bexhill was raised by Peter Cole, Roger Edgerton and Ken Hancock, all keen Swift sailors and frequent visitors to other Swift clubs. The class wanted a new venue for their Southern Area Championship but the Executive Committee turned the request down. Perhaps this had something to do with the lack of enthusiasm for Catamarans generally with some people at that time?

Seven years after their first approach the Swift Association were successful in persuading Bexhill Sailing Club to stage their Southern Area Championship in conjunction with the Condor Class and it all went off very well and to everyone's satisfaction.

The very first championship organised by Bexhill Sailing Club was for the Scorpion Class Southern Area and was held over a Saturday/Sunday weekend in 1970. Some of our Scorpion sailors had been travelling the Scorpion circuit, and sailing rather well. So the Class thought that they should investigate "this place called Bexhill" in more detail and asked us to stage their Southern Area Championships. The organising committee under the chairmanship of Rear Commodore Malcolm Viner performed an excellent job and we were blessed with perfect weather. There were 62 competitors, some from as far away as Cornwall. On the Saturday the winds were easterly up to Force 5, capsizes and gear failure took a heavy toll of the fleet and only 25 boats completed the course. On Sunday the winds were much lighter but shifty and there were some close finishes. The position at the

start of the third and last race was open with the championship title within the reach of any one of four boats.

The overall results were:

- 1st** *Maribou*
Joe Knight and Des Quick
Castle Cove SC 2 ³/₄ points
- 2nd** *Shiny Shovel*
Mike Hathemore and Jim Thomson
Worthing YC 4 ³/₄ points
- 3rd** *Go Go*
John Labbett and Gordon Carruthers
Bexhill SC 5 ³/₄ points
- 4th** *Wee Willy Jerkins*
Keith Jerkins and Tony Williams
Bexhill SC 6 points

Gina Hunt, writing in *Yachting and Boating Weekly* said "Bexhill SC are to be congratulated on their fine organisation of the Southern Area Championships".

In 1976 we progressed to our first Nationals. This was for the Javelin Class held at the same time with the Condor Southern.

The following year we organised the Southern Area Championship for the Mirrors which, by now, had grown numerically into a large class. We had to look after 73 entries.

1982 saw our only other National Championship to date for the Condors who were obviously more than satisfied by the way we had run the previous two Southern for them. Richard Eagleton was Vice Commodore and Race Officer for the event and received much praise for the way he handled the event. We had visitors from France, Ireland and even Yorkshire !

Since then we have hosted three more Albacore Southern, and two Miracle Southern. The Miracle Southern of 1990 had very boisterous conditions but it was great for the spectators. Many boats suffered damage but unlike the James Bond films John Bourne's 007 did not live to fight another day!

OOD Malcolm Viner.



... and Champions

BEXHILL Sailing Club has produced several champions over the years. This has helped to put the Club's name on the sailing map and these are short accounts of the more notable winners.

Don Cooke

In 1950 Don Cooke won the Merlin Rocket National Championship in his boat *Tiptoes* at Burnham on Crouch. Up until then, this had always gone to a club boat based on the Thames.

Mickey Cook

Mickey Cook, sailing his Firefly F627 *Vector* won the Sir Ralph Gore Cup at Benlech, Isle of Anglesea, in 1956 and the next year took the Sir Richard Fairey Cup at Westcliff on Sea to become Firefly National Champion. This was in the days when over 100 Fireflies came to the start line for their Nationals. At Benlech all Fireflies were allocated their own personal parking lots, numbered, and with a short white pole upon which they could fly their own Club Burgee – a nice touch. Mickey was Secretary of the Firefly Association in 1955 and Chairman 1959–61. Mickey had a theory about his boats. He never varnished them, just sandpapered the hulls smooth (we are talking of marine ply hulls of course). He even took a knife and scoured grooves on the side decks to improve the anti-slip qualities. He was famous throughout the Class for the appearance of his boat and at one championship meeting his 'friends' got up early one morning and wallpapered his hull!

Roger Edgerton

Roger Edgerton had many successes with his Swift Catamaran *Skubidu* principally: 1st Royal Sovereign Cat Class 1962, 1964, 1967; 1st UK Nationals 1964 at Clacton; 2nd UK Nationals 1965 at Deal; 1st European Championships 1975 at Scheveningen Holland; 1st Dutch Nationals 1975 and 79 at Scheveningen Holland and 1st at many other open meetings and regattas.

Mike Adams

Mike Adams has had a long, varied and highly successful career in sailing. His major achievements include: 1965, Crewed for Don Bowles in 5-0-5 Europeans at La Rochelle, France at the age of 15; 1966, Came 4th crewing for Don Bowles in 5-0-5 Europeans at La Baulle, France; 1966-1978, Came 1st at Scorpion open meetings at a variety of venues



Mickey Cook demonstrates how to sail a Firefly 'upright'.

including Bexhill, Hythe, Worthing, Newhaven, Castle Cove, Sidmouth, Porthpean, South Cerney, Port Talbot, Conniston Water, Felixstowe, Chipstead, Retford Argonauts.

1970-75. Mike served on the Scorpion National Committee. 1967-78. Took part in National Championships at Plymouth (twice), Saundersfoot, Ferryside, North Berwick (twice), Felixstowe, Hythe (twice) Sidmouth, Tenby, doing well on many occasions but never coming 1st until:- 1979 when Mike won the Scorpion National Championship at Porthpean with Tim Carlisle crewing in Scorpion 1689 *Take me I'm Yours* (his previous boat having been stolen, hence the name) against 133 competitors. Porthpean Sailing Club was where the first Scorpion fleet was formed in 1960. After 13

years endeavour, playing the bridesmaid, the last six of these ending up in the top six places, this was a very fitting and popular win. This was achieved with a 2nd, 1st, 1st, 1st, a dismasting and 11th place.

Gate starts were used successfully on every occasion, the only problem being the large motor cruiser which served as guard boat but appeared to have a will of her own. *Take me I'm Yours* with a second and three firsts was in imminent danger of walking away with the Championships after five races, so everyone's eyes were in her direction at the start of that race when tragedy struck in the form of the badly handled guard boat which collided with *Take me I'm Yours* and sheared off her mast. As it happened other boats fouled the guard boat and the race was restarted with *Take me I'm Yours* sitting forlornly with her broken mast behind the committee boat. Everything now depended on the last race. Mike, now with a borrowed mast was only in the late 20's at the first weather mark but gradually moved up through the fleet until he crossed the line in 11th place to secure the overall victory by $1\frac{3}{4}$ points.

Let us not forget the family support behind the sailors. There can be few champions who do not owe their success to this support – in this case to Mike's wife Dini, who wrote the following for the Scorpion Newsletter:

"First of all we must thank Portpean Sailing Club

for hosting the Championships. I have been to ten consecutive Nationals with Mike and can honestly say, apart from his success, that this year was certainly one of the most enjoyable and well organised meets that I have attended.

There is always something very exciting about Championship week. I think that newcomers to the scene should always be encouraged to come to evening events. This is the only way in which you make new friends as we have done, and how pleasant

it is, year after year, to see familiar faces and exchange stories from the past year.

I think at this point it is my privilege to boast a little bit about Mike's success. Naturally I am very proud and pleased for him. He has at last achieved his ambition as a member of the Scorpion fleet, although he would not admit

it, he is still 'over the moon'.

Of course Mike could not have achieved his success without the assistance of his crew, Tim. This is the third season that Tim has been sailing with Mike. As most of you know, Tim now works at McNamara Sails so has only sailed with Mike at open meetings this summer. Tim is always a keen sailor and a great theorist and he and Mike have spent hours in the past discussing where to put fittings etc. I told them they might do well this year as they don't have time to chat about it, they have just to get on and sail the boat!

1972

Ex President, Dr Ronnie Andrews retired in 1969 and started a world-wide trip in his 11 ton auxiliary bermudan sloop Merlin. He returned from his circumnavigation of the world in 1972 after 34000 miles, 172 anchorages and 17 countries in three years.

1963



A Lebanese freighter "Aghios" with a cargo of esparto grass caught fire off Eastbourne and was run aground at Normans Bay, still on fire.

"Well, over to the annual racing for those of you who did not see the action! At the start of the first race we were all relaxing on the beach when Jell yelled 'They're first, Dini' What a panic set in. Mike and Tim stayed in the lead until 100 yards from the last leeward mark when six boats sailed through them, including Duncan Sclare who eventually took the lead and Mike was second.

The next three days followed in something of a dream. I do not think any of us really believed it was happening when by Wednesday night Mike and Tim had four super results, 2nd, 1st, 1st, 1st. On Wednesday evening tempers were frayed and nerves on edge because the next race was all-important. I do not think I can ever remember feeling so physically and mentally sick as I did on Thursday at 11.25 am as Mike and Tim slowly headed for the shore with a mast lying on the deck. It was, at the time, complete desolation, the long faces and silences were almost too much to bear. However, three hours later with the problem nearly rectified, another mast in position, they set out for a trial sail. I really can't say much more about Thursday, it all passed in a ghastly dream.

Friday dawned with absolute silence. Mike and Tim went off nailbiting for the first time during the week. On shore the Adams clan were really suffering – Janet and I felt so ill we couldn't eat or drink. Mike's Mum had lost her voice, and my Mum had a migraine (all through tension). I can't describe that race. It was too tense to describe but it was about forty minutes after the finish that it was officially confirmed that Mike had made it virtually on the line and we could all relax and enjoy ourselves."

1979 was also the year Mike became Commodore of the Bexhill Sailing Club (and for the following year)

1988. He was first in the Laser Inland Masters Championship.

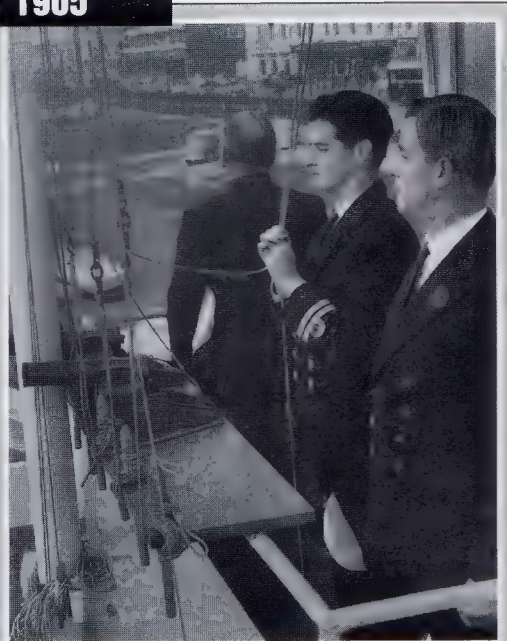
1989. Mike was racing instructor for the South East Area racing team.

1985 – 1993. Mike was joint Cadet Captain at Bexhill Sailing Club. From about 1977 onwards he successfully taught Louise, Joanna and Matthew to sail and in 1990 bought Scorpion "Cream Cracker" to relive his youth !

Ken Hancock

In 1978 Ken Hancock, who was Rear Commodore at the time, took his new Peter Butcher built Swift Catamaran to Seasalter and with the help of Chris

1965



With the Clubhouse now in commission 1965 was the first year that the club starting cannon was used to mark the Remembrance Day 2-Minute Silence during the Service at the War Memorial, It has been used every year since.

Fagg crewing achieved two second places and two firsts to win the Southern Area Championships in heavy seas and strong winds. He was also first in the Cat class in the Royal Sovereign Race in 1970 and 1979

Keith Jerkins

Keith Jerkins has had a long varied and distinguished career in championship racing. He was first in the Eastbourne Royal Sovereign Race 1967 in a Scorpion, 1973 in a 5-0-5 and 1977 in a Fireball.

In 1968 Keith went to Littlehampton where the 'Lazy E' Class were holding their National Championships. Keith sailed at the meeting and walked off with the championship. This in a boat completely unfamiliar to him.

Keith's achievements started in the Scorpion Class when he either won or was well placed at many open meetings and championships. He then moved on to the 5-0-5 class in the early 70's coming 8th in the GB Nationals in 1972. Eastbourne used to run a prestigious race, the 'Silver Salver' for 5-0-5's and Flying Dutchmen racing against each other on equal terms. There was very keen rivalry between these

two classes at that time and Keith did very well to come 1st in the 1973 race in his 5-0-5.

Keith and his crew Brian Jones qualified for the 5-0-5 Worlds in Bermuda in 1975. This was the second time in three years that these two had qualified. Previously they were all set to go to Hong Kong but could not afford the £600 it would cost and sponsorship was not forthcoming. They sold their boat *Just In* and bought a new 5-0-5 which they named *Hard Up*. Eventually, Jo Davis of Belle Hill, the garage proprietor did sponsor them for Bermuda.

Still with the 5-0-5 Keith won the Bloody Mary at Queen Mary Reservoir in 1976 and the following year won the Irish National 5-0-5 championships.

We now move to the Javelin Class where a 3rd in the European Championships in Holland was notched up and the GB National Championship held at Bexhill in 1976 went to Keith and his boat *Curved Air*. Keith had six wins out of six races and competed against nine crews from Holland and two from Germany apart from the British contingent. During one tough race a Javelin sank and was lost completely.

Keith's travels took him to Africa where he continued to perform well, now in Lasers, and he had top placings including 1sts at open meetings in Kenya and Tanzania in the 1980's.

He then travelled to Norway but you could still not keep a good man down. Keith proceeded to take the second spot in the Norwegian Hobie Catamaran National Championships

Steve Joblin

Another Bexhill National champion was Steve Joblin sailing at Minis Bay in 1992 in his Nacra 5.2 Catamaran to win the GB Nationals.

Richard Eagleton

Richard and Pip Eagleton helped to keep the name of Bexhill on the sailing map in 1992 by sailing their *Miracle Purple Heart* into 1st place at the Southern Area Championships at Worthing

Simon Baber

Simon Baber won the Albacore Southern Area Championship held at Bexhill in 1991. Later that year, but for a cruel twist of fate,

Simon crewed by Colin Goodman would have won the Albacore World Championship which was held at Edinburgh. 77 boats took part in a series of 8 races with 7 to count.

The pair streaked ahead in the practise race but did not finish as superstition says it is unlucky to win. However, they went on to win race one.

The Albacore Class keeps a book on the 'runners and riders' to assist the Albacore funds and add a bit of fun at the start of the meeting. Simon and *Reckless Rat* were quoted at 5 to 1. After the first day's racing they were odds on favourites – a dentist and a school lad tipped to beat the professional sailmakers and boatbuilders. They came third in races two and three

to tie with McNamara on points. Race four they won easily and came third in race five, so they were now two points clear overall.

Thursday was a lay day but races six and seven scheduled for the Friday were postponed until Saturday because of gales. So, together with race eight it meant that three races had to be sailed back to back still in Force 6-7 winds. Colin was committed to leaving the meeting on Friday evening to fly to Holland for the Mirror European Championships.

Under the rules of major regattas Simon had advised the organisers, well in advance, that he would need an experienced replacement crew and the local sailing club supplied him with a crew weighing only 9½ stone, 6ft 2in tall and with little body strength and experience. After a capsized in the first of the Saturday races, Simon decided to retire to save the boat and sails so had to count the last two races as discards. This had the effect of dropping him down to 12th overall, still a praiseworthy result and this from someone not in the best of health. In fact, twelve months later Simon had a kidney transplant.

Colin Goodman

Colin Goodman began racing competitively at the age of 10 choosing the Mirror Class to start with. There was some competition for him in this class at Bexhill in that early learning stage and the boat suited his crew/weight size. His sister, Elaine, crewed for

1967

In September we suffered severe gales which, coinciding with high spring tides, broke up the Colonnade lower deck which had stood since 1910 when it was built.

1967

Peter Scott visited Bexhill on a tour to raise funds for the World Wildlife Fund (as it was in those days). He also visited the Sailing Club and started a race with 30 entries with the money raised from entry fees going to his Fund

him and this is something Colin has always insisted on, having a reliable helm/crew relationship. The pair won the Midland Area, Southern Area and Welsh Area Championships and the National Youth Championships. They went on to score third in the European Championships in Sweden, fourth in the 1991 Nationals and ninth in the Worlds in Holland.

Colin then had a spell at the front end of the boat gaining a good insight into this aspect from the crew's point of view. This was done initially crewing in an Albacore for Simon Baber and later for Mike McNamara, which partnership was successful in winning the Albacore Worlds in 1993 at Delaware USA. Colin, helming, also won the National Junior Championship in four consecutive years.

Colin then went on to broaden his sailing abilities in the Scorpion fleet, a boat which is speed orientated with the added interest of a spinnaker and the technology of an adjustable rig, mast bend, spreader angle, jib track position, rig tension and ability to depower and power up as required. He had firsts at various open meetings, third in the National Traveller series and third in the National Championships in 1993.

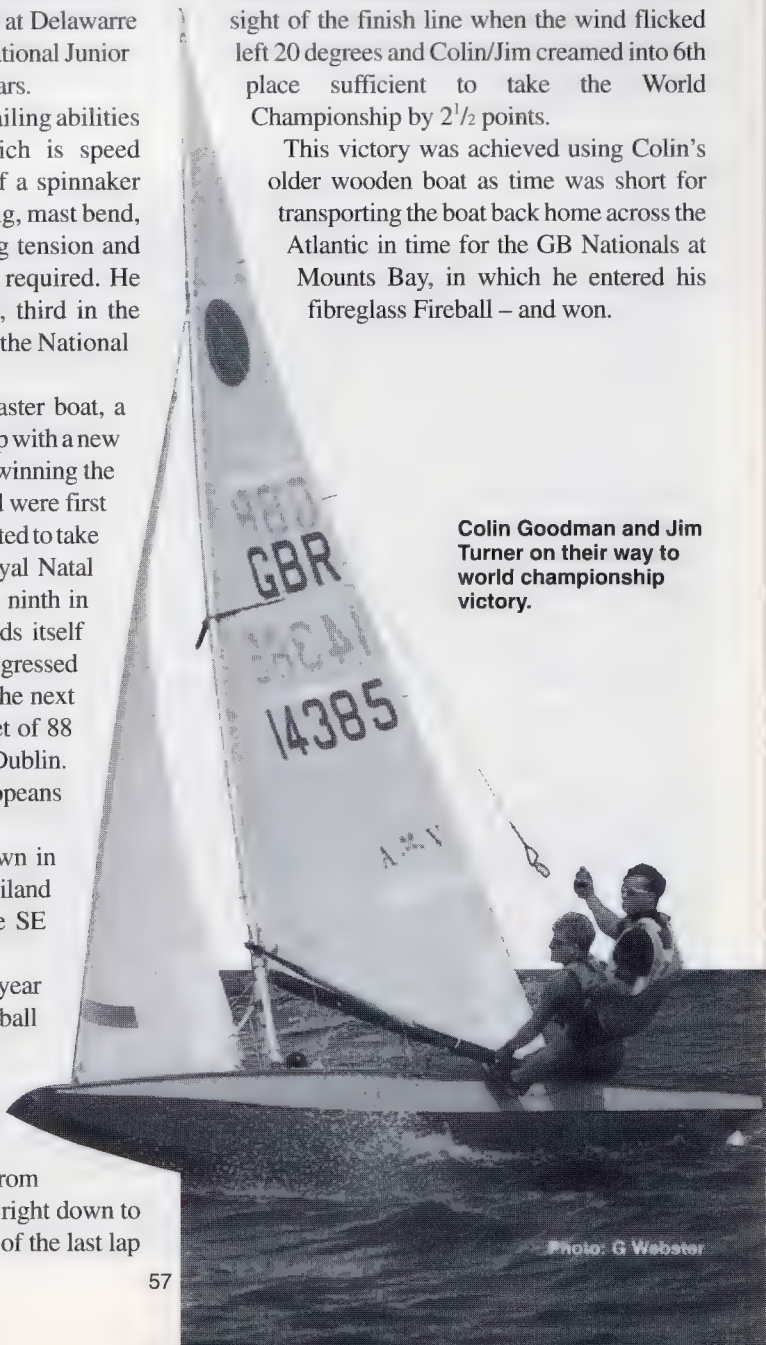
Colin now moved on to a much faster boat, a trapeze boat, the Fireball and teamed up with a new crew, Jim Turner. They started off by winning the Fireball Class in the Bloody Mary and were first in the Junior Nationals. They were invited to take part in the Fireball Worlds at the Royal Natal Club, Durban R.S.A. and notched up ninth in the Pre-Worlds and 21st in the Worlds itself when Colin was still only 21. They progressed steadily at many open meetings and the next year, 1995, came second out of a fleet of 88 boats in the Fireball Worlds held at Dublin. Colin also obtained third in the Europeans and sixth in the GB Nationals.

The pair were becoming well known in the sailing world and had a spell in Thailand coaching the Malaysian team for the SE Asia Sea Games.

1996 has proved to be a very good year for Colin and Jim. They won the Fireball National Championships of France and Belgium and Great Britain and Canada and to crown it all have won the Worlds held at Kingston, Lake Ontario against competitors from eleven countries. It was touch and go right down to the wire, quite literally, to the last leg of the last lap

of the last race. Eric and Rudi Moser from Switzerland only needed to finish in the first ten and three boats ahead of Goodman/Turner to clinch the championship. A wind shift on the first beat put Colin and Jim down to 35th place at the windward mark with the Swiss pair 25th, so at that point both teams were out of contention. They both made steady progress through the fleet until at the start of the final beat the Swiss pair were lying 5th and leading the championship with Colin/Jim down in 15th place. They headed off to the left of the course on a forecasted windshift. The Mosers were within sight of the finish line when the wind flicked left 20 degrees and Colin/Jim creamed into 6th place sufficient to take the World Championship by 2½ points.

This victory was achieved using Colin's older wooden boat as time was short for transporting the boat back home across the Atlantic in time for the GB Nationals at Mounts Bay, in which he entered his fibreglass Fireball – and won.



Colin Goodman and Jim Turner on their way to world championship victory.

Photo: G Webster

As the years roll by...

...interesting things continue to happen

IN 1967 The Sea Angling Club had outgrown their premises and were looking for new premises. They applied to the Town Council for permission to site their clubhouse and boat park on land to the west of the Sailing Club HQ taking up to 20 to 30 feet of the Club's boat park. The Estates and Parks Committee agreed in principle subject to the Sailing Club's agreement. We could not afford to lose that much space and it was thought the plan would be restricting on both Clubs because of their very close proximity. So it was turned down. Further west during the same year another plan did get the go-ahead and the Sovereign Light Cafe was opened.

In 1972 a novelty light-hearted race was staged between the Rowing Club, Bexhill Round Table, Hollingsworth Garage and the Sailing Club in home-made 'boats'. The Rowing Club had an old fours galley with outriggers, Hollingsworths had a two hulled steel panelled contraption and the Round Table craft consisted mainly of tin cases and bits of wood and string. Our own entry was the old Shearwater hull *Katastrophe*, a sort of spare rescue boat. The rules were very vague, the only one we all seemed to agree on being a minimum crew of 5, The Round Table craft soon broke up and disintegrated. Hollingsworth's craft capsized and sank. We do not think that it was ever established who actually won – if that mattered!

The following year, 1973, saw the first of our electric boat winches installed. This was in direct

opposition to Billy Gordon-Harris' personal winch, a converted lawn mower machine, which he used to haul his Albacore up the beach.

A disaster was narrowly avoided due to the keen eye sight and quick actions of a club member during 1973. George and Ann Pickles, new members of only 4 weeks standing, capsized their boat *Tardis* early one evening off the club when they were out sailing on their own with no club back-up. However, they were spotted by John Brockhurst from his College Road home and the Hastings RNLI Inshore rescue boat was despatched and all ended well. A high note for '73 was the membership total, which peaked at an all time high of 599.

The following year, 1974, the Club finally paid off the last of the interest-free loan provided by Mr C.C. Gulliver.

In 1995, attending a Commodores reception in Park Lane London, Rear Commodore, Bob Crozier, accompanied by Kate Scotcher were presented to Her Royal Highness, The Princess Royal, Princess Anne, who hosted the event in her capacity of President of the RYA.

The fact that Bexhill Sailing Club was invited to attend this reception is indeed an honour, as from nearly 100 clubs within the RYA south east region we were one of only six to whom this invitation was extended and the only club from East Sussex. This endorses the high regard held for Bexhill Sailing Club within the sailing world.

1968

Peter Cole and Alex Morrison built the store under the ramp.

Naval traditions

THE Royal Naval Auxiliary Service (RNXS) was active in Bexhill and they held their first Trafalgar Night Dinner at the clubhouse on October 1993. Government cut-backs in defence expenditure meant the disbandment of the RNXS in 1994. However, this was quickly followed by the establishment of the Bexhill branch of the Royal Naval Association and through the keenness of a dedicated band of individuals the Maritime Volunteer Service was born and they have held their own Trafalgar Night Dinners at Bexhill Sailing Club ever since.

The Bexhill branch of the RNA now has over 100 members. The Bexhill unit of the MVS is steadily growing in numbers with 13 BSC members in their ranks at the last count with Bill Smith head of the Bexhill Unit and Les Quilty head of the South East Regional Unit.



Epic voyages...

...we now move onto a different tack with accounts of some voyages across the channel, during the 50's, in small dinghies undertaken by intrepid sailors or completely crazy individuals, depending on your point of view.



CAPTAIN Joshua Slocum sailed his yacht *Spray* round the world alone, the first man to do so in 1895 taking 3 years to do the 46,000 mile journey. Francis Chichester won the first solo sailing race across the Atlantic in 1960.

Chay Blyth and John Ridgeway rowed across the Atlantic in 1966 and that year Francis Chichester set out on his solo circum-navigation of the world with one stop in *Gipsy Moth* at the age of 65, closely followed by Alec Rose in *Lively Lady*.

In 1968/69 Robin Knox-Johnstone was the first man to sail round the world without stopping and a year later Chay Blyth sailed round the world in a westerly direction.

The first Whitbread Round the World race was held in 1973/74 and in 1977/78 Naomi James was the first woman to circum-navigate the world solo.

There have also been notable voyages in dinghies, for example, a cruise across the North Sea to Norway by a *Wayfarer* and from Scotland to Iceland in 1963 by Frank Dye of Watton, Norfolk, a voyage that took 11 days with three gales of Force 7 and over.

But in 1952 Bexhill entered the picture with Derry Longley and Mike Macey and a 14ft dinghy called *St. Kitts*. Here follows their story and that of others who followed in their wake...

From Bexhill to France...

...in a Fuss and no bother – by M E Macey

IT IS true that when I bought the boat in the spring of 1949 – from a chap who had had it built in the previous year – I could distinguish between the sharp and blunt ends because service in the Navy had not left me entirely ignorant on such matters but beyond that my experience of sailing craft had been limited by the size of the lake in the local park. In the circumstances, the obvious thing to do was to join a sailing club, which I did at Bexhill, and there I soon linked up with E.W. Longley (Derry) who had also learned a thing or two at public expense during the War. For the first part of the sailing season that year he helmed the boat, which I had renamed *St. Kitts*, while I learned the rudiments of the game, but later we reversed the roles and he became my regular crew.

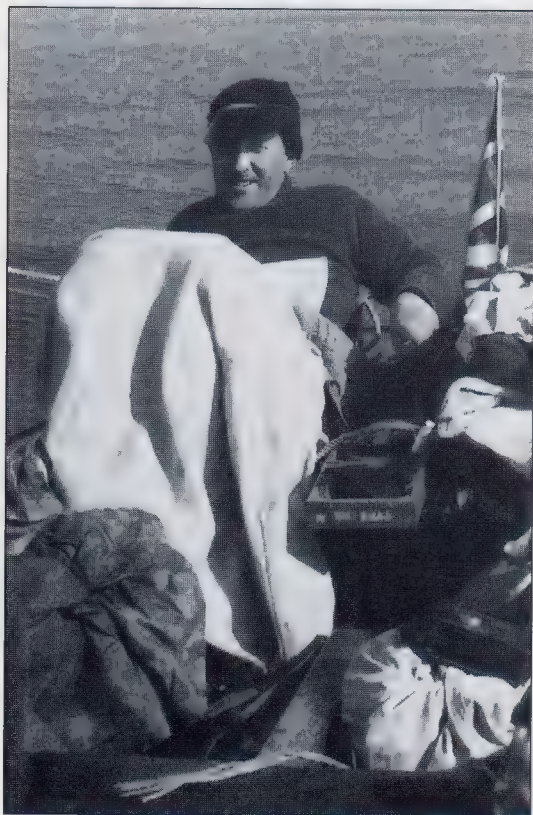
We have always got on well together mainly, I suppose, because we are both fairly placid which is probably why I listened to him when, on the

principle that the grass in the farthest field is always greenest, I made the first tentative suggestion for a long distance cruise in the following season. Derry, with his greater experience, counselled caution. Actually, the germ of the idea of a sailing holiday in France was born when, in saying goodbye to Derry's friend from Paris, we jocularly threatened to run over in *St. Kitts* one week-end on a return visit. A germ, they say, is a bug and certainly that bug got well and truly into our blood so that during the 1951 season there was little else to talk about during the off spells from club racing.

As, of course, we couldn't very well embark on the venture without her, naturally we put the proposal to *St. Kitts* as soon as we knew about it ourselves and from the way she over-rode everything the sea could throw at her that year, or chortled to herself as she wheedled the lighter waters which came caressing her bows, it was obvious that she, too, was all in favour of sampling foreign waters as soon as possible. That really decided the matter and for the rest of the summer, the three of us settled down to train hard for the following year.

In a boat the size of *St. Kitts*, a half-decked fourteen footer, built on the lines of an Irish Dinghy Racing Association One Design 'Fuss', there was little we could do in the way of constructional preparation for the trip but during the winter we completely refurbished her, discarding all suspicious rigging and replacing or strengthening wherever necessary, which she cheerfully put up with those minor internal modifications made for the purpose of carrying additional gear and buoyancy, so that by the time the bleak months gave place to a brighter spring, she was looking spick and span and very sure of herself. In between time, Derry and I spent many sessions with John Edwards, the club's boat-builder, who taught us all we know about navigation while the Vice-Commodore (Dr. R.A. Andrews) gave us many invaluable general hints on cruising.

The next thing was to get started. We knew we should have to go early in the year as this was the only time Derry and I could snatch away from our respective businesses and we settled for mid-May



Derry awakens to a tranquil early dawn.

as the most likely time to strike a fairly lengthy spell of fine weather. Leaving the actual date somewhat elastic, eventually we settled on Saturday the 17th and planned to spend the previous day in making leisurely last minute adjustments but the weather report we got from Lympne at 18.30 hours on the 16th jerked us into a decision to get away at once to take full advantage of the extremely favourable conditions then prevailing. This sudden change of plan gave us a frantic two hours in which to get afloat before the tide left too much of the long beach exposed and at precisely 20.25 hours we were pushed off from Bexhill by club members and others who had gathered to wish us good luck. Optimistically, we left under all of our 120 square feet of mainsail and jib into a fresh S.E. wind and rather lumpy sea and it was not until we turned into the wind to roll in five turns on the mainsail boom after getting very wet and cold in the first half-hour, that we remembered the folly of sailing on a Friday.

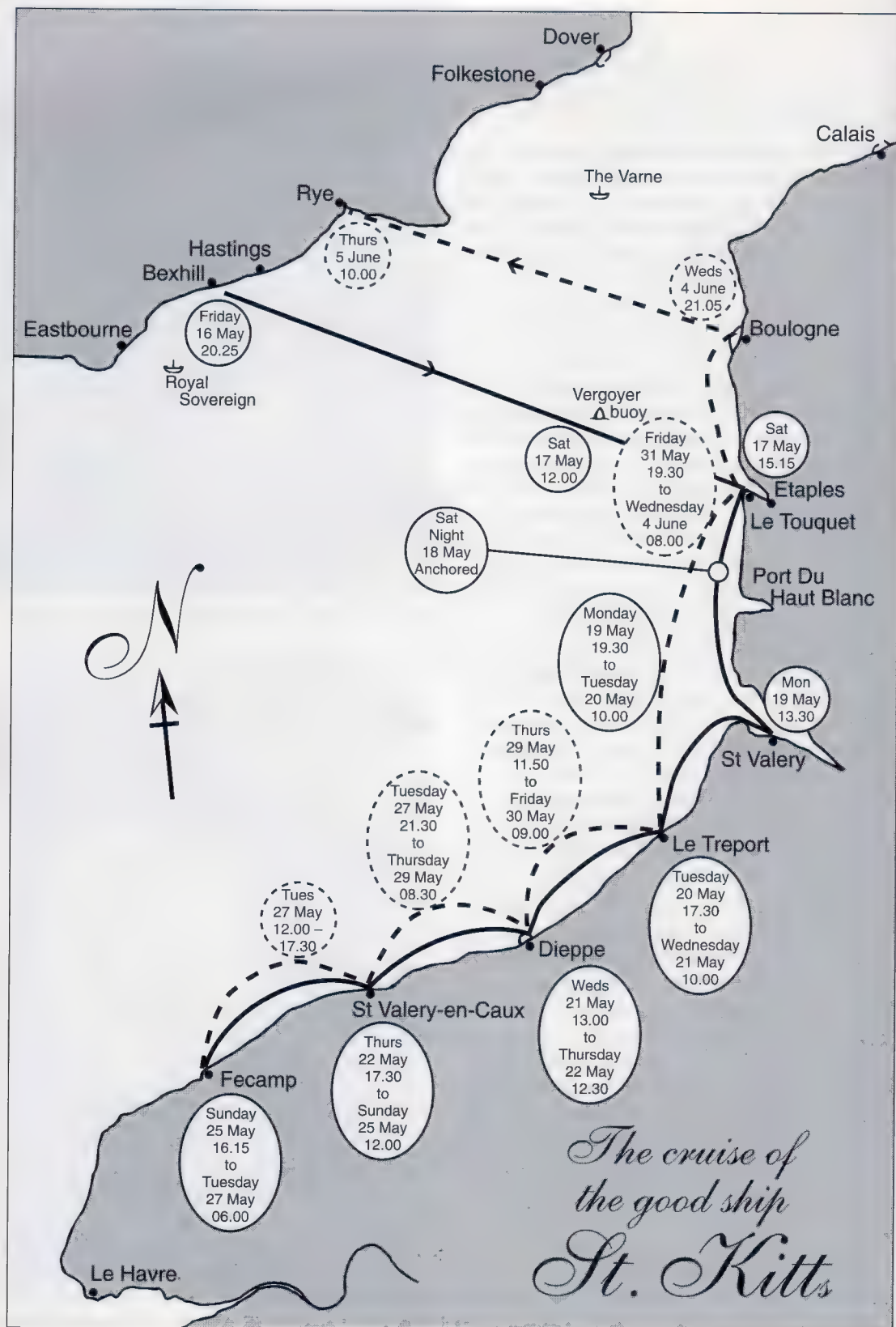
Like the little lady she is (sometimes!), *St. Kitts* pranced merrily on quite oblivious to our preoccupation of getting through the main channel shipping lanes without mishap in the approaching darkness where, in the absence of riding lights, we used the recognised system of illuminating the mainsail with our high-powered torch, flashing a second light in the direction of oncoming vessels. What those monsters thought of our midget craft out there in the middle of the night is, of course, an official secret but by midnight, having narrowly missed sinking at least five of them, we reckoned the worst of that particular hazard over and, adapting ourselves to a slight change of wind, were able to set a better course and so kept drier. Settling down fairly comfortably for the remainder of the night there were times when we could almost read a book in the amazing phosphorescent glow from our wake, a phenomenon of which we had read but not experienced before.

With the arrival of dawn at 03.45 hours, we gave Dot and Carrie, the two carrier pigeons, their ration of refreshment and, indulging ourselves in the final splicing of the mainbrace of the crossing, discovered that we had not been as temperate as



we had imagined for only half a bottle remained. This we decided to conserve against future emergencies but, in due time, presented it to a fisherman who later rendered us some service. A quarter-of-an-hour later we gave *St. Kitts* her first real rest while we hove-to, shook out two turns of the mainsail and did what we could in the way of early morning exercises to restore warmth and circulation. Probably it was as well that we were alone in those wild wastes for, if our gesticulatory antics had been observed, without a doubt we should have been rescued before we could get time to explain!

Getting under way again, we sailed on in a failing breeze until 09.00 hours when we were almost becalmed. Except to admire the surrounding scenery, there was not much we could do about it but wonder whether we had, in fact, been travelling in the right direction during the night. The sight of a couple of trawlers looming up ahead, but too far off course to contact, gave a partial reassurance on the point so for a time we sailed in the direction of a vague noise which we fondly hoped was coming from French soil but which eventually we found emanated from a whistling buoy some miles off. About this time, the appearance of a third trawler perked us up a bit and, steering for her, came alongside when we were able to prove the value of



Esperanto of which, unfortunately, neither side could speak a word and, as our feeble French was outmatched by their complete ignorance of the Queen's English, we cast off at 10.45 hours certainly no wiser and, perhaps, a little sadder. *St. Kitts*, who was sailing along as fast as the light airs would permit, made no bother about anything and, shortly afterwards, cocking a snook at a second buoy in the distance, enable us to check our position in the proximity of the Vergoyer Shallows. Two hours later, at 13.30 hours, we sighted France. Clearly this was the time to send home news of our progress and Carrie, who had not taken too kindly to her sea voyage, was sent off first followed five minutes later by Dot who, we learned subsequently, arrived twelve hours ahead of Carrie, making the journey in 3½ hours – about one fifth of the time it had taken us. Now we know just why the Psalmist yearned so wistfully for the wings of a dove!

The last lingering thoughts of mal-de-mer quickly evaporated as, in a freshening breeze, we set course for Etaples and, touching down at 15.15 hours, we grinned pleasantly at the bikini sunbathers. Once more bringing the whole of our French vocabulary into play, we learned that we were not at Etaples after all but at Le Touquet – not marked as such on our chart – and on the advice of an English speaking Frenchman, we put to sea again to make for the sailing club at the mouth of the River Canche just around the headland. After a run up the river to Etaples and back to the club site, we beached *St. Kitts* and pitched our tent on the dunes at the rear almost exactly 24 hours after launching from Bexhill.

Feeling both dirty and hungry, it was a toss up whether to eat or wash first but the call of the inner man proved stronger and only when we had feasted ourselves on a gorgeous meal of soup, bacon and eggs, did we wander off for a clean up under the tap outside the club not yet opened for the season. And then it was that we met our first disaster for, when we returned to camp to collect up the remains of the provisions which, like innocents abroad we had trustfully left lying around, we were greeted by a very-pleased-with-himself French hound who had done the clearing up for us very effectively and who, having consumed four large rashers of bacon, the remains of our butter and the whole of our cooking fat, obviously considered all Englishmen either mad or generous to leave such tempting morsels so completely unprotected. Thus we



Mike on the foredeck.

learned the hard way always to re-stow consumable stores before going out for the night. After a stroll into Le Touquet, where we sampled French beer for the first – and last – time, we returned to camp and turned in, resting very comfortably on our beds of buoyancy bags until 06.30 hours when gendarmes arrived to check up on us. On their departure, apparently satisfied that we were not a couple of missing diplomats, we snuggled down again until 10.30 hours when, as the log records, breakfast was baconless as a result of our overnight visitor. Sunday being a day of rest, we slept again until 15.15 hours when, after re-arranging the stowing of *St. Kitts* to bring more weight aft, we prepared to leave for St. Valery (sur Somme) which we hoped to make our next stop.

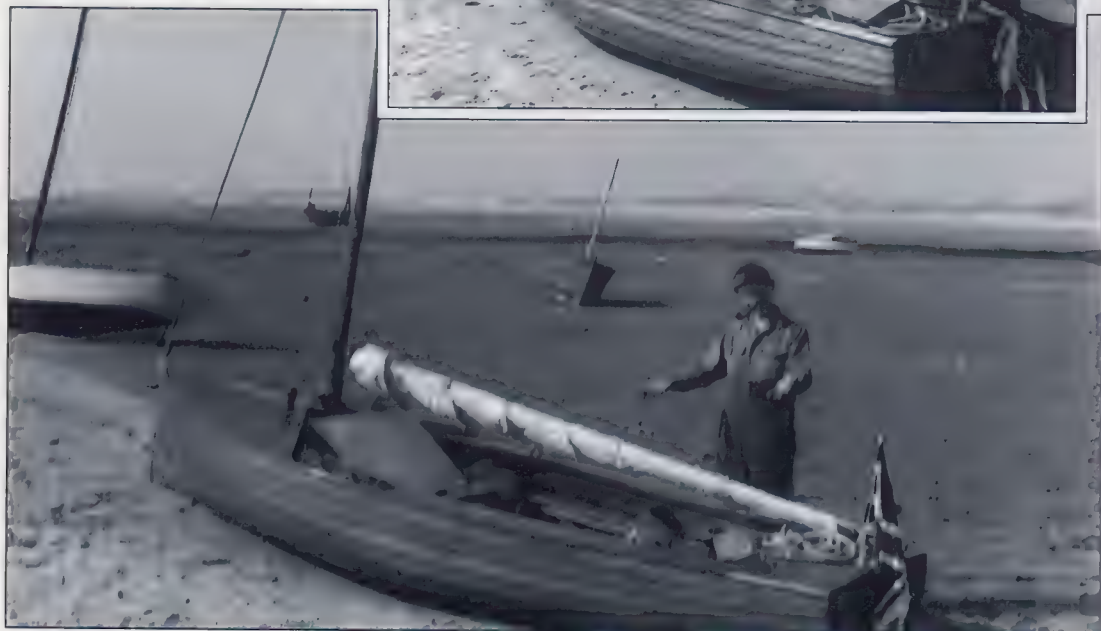
Looking back we now wish we had disregarded the advice of the London born Frenchman who took us on his motor yacht to have a look at the weather outside, for postponing our departure until 21.00 hours we were unable to make St. Valery that night as, after a fairly easy run down the coast, the wind faded out on us and we had to anchor off Point Haut Banc. There we slept snugly and warm aboard *St. Kitts* on comfortable beds of beach slides and

buoyancy bags completely unaware of our dragging anchor. However, we were still afloat in the morning and, after breakfast of soup, omelettes and tea – all cooked on the invaluable primus – we set spinnaker to light winds en route for the Somme. Entering the Somme at 13.30 hours at low tide, we struck some choppy water and had to be wary of sandbanks but, once inside the river, the water was dead calm and, with the wind freshening again, we made some good progress during which Derry took a refresher over the stern, dangled at the end of a line! Then, with the tide still ebbing, a nasty-tempered sandbank came up and hit us so that we were delayed for an hour. Even this had its compensation for, getting off when the tide turned and nicely reefed down, we had an exhilarating impromptu race with a returning fishing fleet up the river to St. Valery where we arrived at 19.30 hours to pitch our tent on the river bank.

Reprovisioned, we struck camp and set sail at 10.00 hours on Tuesday under a 4-knot current,

simply shooting out of the river and passing the Somme bell buoy at 12.30 hours on the leg to Tréport. For an hour with following wind, sea and current, our grand speed was $5\frac{1}{2}$ knots but by 13.50 hours, we were becalmed again and resorted to paddling for an hour in the forlorn hope of making harbour before the tide failed. The tide beat us to it and we had to drop the hook just outside when the wind, which had been looking for us in all the wrong places, found us again and chuckling like mad, proceeded to whip up an angry sea for the whole of the $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours we were waiting for sufficient water to get across the sand bar. When we did get in and tie up at 17.30 hours, we were glad to get ashore for a hot meal and, tired enough not to bother with the tent, decided to pass the night in an open railway wagon – which was where we made mistake number two. Only the generosity of a local hotelier in putting a super-heated bathroom at our disposal next morning restored the personal comforts and tempers of two very sand-begrimed

**All that equipment
carefully stowed
away and still
room for two crew.**



mariners who ought to have known better than to be tempted by a bed of soft sand in an open truck when the wind is blowing at half gale force!

Leaving Tréport at 10.00 hours the following day on a dropping tide, the log records that we were reefed down in fresh N.E. winds and sailing with a strong current; indeed *St. Kitts* showed her paces to such purpose that, at 13.00 hours, we realised we had overshot Dieppe and going about we stood by the cross channel steamer to escort us in. In the inner basin we tied up alongside *Silver Cloud*, an English yacht, who entertained us royally.

After repairs had been made to the boom which we noticed was split, we left Dieppe next day (Thursday) at 12.30 hours and, once more well reefed down *St. Kitts*, simply scudded through the harbour mouth and 'surfed' all the way to St. Valéry-en-Caux. Again we had to anchor for sufficient water over the bar and getting into harbour at 17.30 hours, in high winds, tons of surf and only two feet of water was a tricky business so that Derry took the precaution of stripping down against an emergency which looked as if it might arise at any moment. Our rather apprehensive state of mind then suffered a further shock when a half mad, grizzly looking fisherman suddenly appeared out of the sea, rather like Father Neptune, and perched himself on our stern. We hadn't a notion how he got there and were not a little fearful lest he should order us to join him at his court below. In the circumstances, our hospitality had to be limited to half a cup of rum which effectively increased his gesticulations but, regrettably, made his mutterings even more incoherent than before. However, when at last we got safely in, he repaid us handsomely by scrounging a barrow on which we loaded all our gear – by that time in need of an airing – and helped us to push it up the cliff where we pitched camp for the night. Having been travelling almost continuously since we left Bexhill, we felt we had earned a respite and rested here until Sunday when, after a merry evening on Saturday aboard the French yacht *Rip Rap*, we left at noon.

An adverse current and headwind made our passage out of the harbour almost as difficult as our entry but with 'St. Kitts' answering every call with delightful co-operation, we made it and, once outside, set spinnaker and made for Fecamp where we arrived at 16.15 hours. The weather was warm and, so far, winds had favoured us all the way so

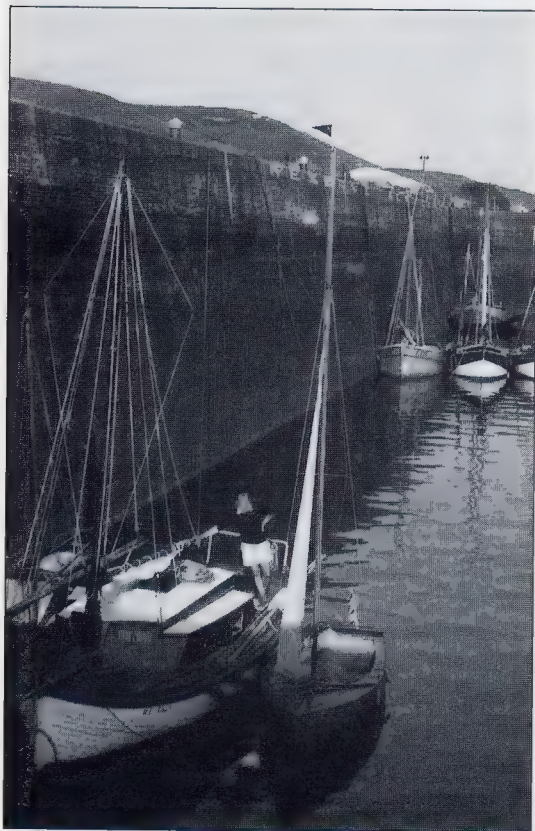


A bird's eye view of *St. Kitts* taken in Tréport.

that contemplating a hard tack on the return journey, we decided that this must be the southernmost limit of our cruise. Spending a pleasant, if uneventful day ashore on Monday, we were up with the lark next day to stow gear and get under way by 06.00 hours when, to our very pleasant surprise, we found the wind had gone completely round to the S.W giving us the run one only dreams about all the way back to St. Valéry-en-Caux. Here we took another brief spell ashore, from noon until 17.30 hours, when we decided to push on although, by this time, it was blowing up to force 6. Well reefed down and all to ourselves in rough and steep seas, life jackets were worn for the first time since the crossing but nothing daunted *St. Kitts* and, despite a foul tide, she brought us into Dieppe in four hours. We were glad to get in and tie up at 21.30 hours and later, tucked up in our sleeping bags in the long grass, we slept until 10.00 hours next day. Still too rough to leave, we spent a not too congenial day ashore in the first rain of the trip. It was owing to the rain that we thought it advisable to pitch our tent for the second night

on the sea front, which we did, only to be unceremoniously disturbed at 06.45 hours by gendarmes who, despite language difficulties, gave us forcibly to understand that camping was not permitted there. Although the wind was still up to force 5 and the seas very rough, we were not sorry to leave this rather unappetising port and, at 08.30 hours we set off, with mainsail reefed above the first batten and storm jib brought into use for the first time, en route for Tréport once more. This proved to be the worst leg of the journey for seas were so rough and waves so steep that at times the high cliffs were completely obscured and, discretion being the better part of valour, life jackets were again worn. Through it all, *St. Kitts* stood up well to everything the sea could do to her and, keeping herself nice and dry and tidy as she had done throughout the trip, took us safely through the really frightening surf of Tréport harbour at 11.50 hours.

Where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise and with lingering memories of the open truck of our previous visit, we pitched our tent on the only



St. Kitts tied up alongside *Lady Betty Two*, Boulogne harbour.

available patch of grass -immediately behind the gendarmerie. Having emptied *St. Kitts* of all gear and impediments which required a clean-up after Dieppe, there were two most annoyed Englishmen in Tréport that night when M. le Capitaine de Police, flatly refused to listen to their pleas, abruptly ordering them off his domain. After a meal, two very weary Englishmen humped their tent and sleeping kit to a spot on the top of the cliff two miles away, the only place permitted by this official. Still, when we were sure his back was turned for the night, we managed to persuade the duty constable to let us store the remainder of our gear in the station – actually in the Captain's office – being very careful to clear it away before he arrived next day!

Friday was a brilliantly hot day which we spent in furbishing *St. Kitts* and re-stowing gear preparatory to leaving next day at 09.00 hours for Le Touquet. In a day of variable winds and thundery weather, in which we were either becalmed or fighting, under reef, some very strong winds, we made the 30-mile leg by 19.30 hours. Having beached *St. Kitts* almost at low tide, Derry gallantly roused himself at 04.00 hours next morning to heave her up to about high water mark and then, at 08.30 hours, we were disturbed again by gendarmes who, in the peculiar way of French police, insisted upon the production of non-existent ship's papers. To satisfy them we tramped, a couple of days later, about 8 miles to the nearest Customs Officer who laughed heartily and shrugged a cynical comment on the zeal of police in general. Lest we should meet with further inquisitive gendarmes, he very kindly provided us with a most official-looking stamp on an odd piece of paper but as, since then, no French eyes have ever gazed on it, we are left to treasure it as a souvenir of an amusing little episode.

Our stay in Le Touquet was lengthened by gales and rainstorms which necessitated re-driving the tent pegs twice during the first night and a move next day (Whit-Monday) to a more sheltered position. Somewhere or other I seemed to have picked up a slight chill and so was content to rest myself in camp all that day, which gave Derry the opportunity to amuse himself for a while bird-watching at the local swimming pool. On his impressions of this occupation, the log is more secret than silent but it does record that tiring of it after a time, he abandoned it in favour of taking a

**Journey over and back
home safe and sound.**



French boy for a trip in *St. Kitts*! The opening of the season since our last visit to Le Touquet, was reflected in the increased cost of our living expenses for prices almost doubled themselves during our short absence, seriously jeopardising our reserves of currency so that when our portable radio promised us better weather and, after stowing gear, we sailed out of the harbour under spinnaker at 08.00 hours. Outside, we dropped the spinnaker and sailing with the current and light S.W. winds, tied up at Boulogne at noon alongside *Lady Betty Two*, a Burnhum-on-Crouch six-tonner, who refreshed our palates once more with canned English beer.

Spending a few hours stocking *St. Kitts* with those delights of France which all travellers seem to covet, two good reasons presented themselves for an immediate return home. Least of these, perhaps, was the radio threat of deteriorating weather after the next 48 hours for, by far, the more pressing urge arose from our discovery that our precious purchases had left us with precisely one franc between us at the end of our currency allowance. Suitably fortified, therefore, by the products of France so recently added to our cargo, we were irritably happy with ourselves as we cast off at 21.05 hours from Boulogne for the night trip across the channel. Setting course for Rye, we made fair progress for the first three hours but, having carelessly left our bread behind, had to content ourselves with a brew of black coffee for supper. After that we took turns in sleeping off the effects of France. At midnight, with the light of Dungeness flashing a tantalising welcome, the S.E. wind dropped away until dawn when we were ready for more hot coffee and soup. The lighthouse itself

became visible at about 05.00 hours and for a further three hours a moderate breeze brought an agreeable progress. Then becalmed again in a lumpy sea, we paddled a couple of miles until a fresh breeze arrived to bring us into Rye Harbour at 10.00 hours. There we were unlucky in having to wait about all day for the Customs which we did not clear until 19.30 hours.

The journey was over. Back in Bexhill, 'St. Kitts' who had done a magnificent job, was relieved of all her burdens and, high and dry, left to her own reminiscences while Derry and I celebrated a grand holiday in approved fashion. We had proved what we set out to prove, that a continental holiday with a direct channel crossing was a practical proposition for a fourteen footer; provided the boat is sound and no unnecessary risks are taken. Although, of course, a certain amount of 'roughing it' is inevitable, there is no need at all to be uncomfortable and with every hour of every day bringing its change of weather, scenery or circumstance, boredom cannot exist. Under conditions which call for the practice of constant ingenuity, there is no test which good seamanship cannot survive and, on its lighter or less strenuous side, such a holiday gives a slant on continental travel denied to the ordinary tourist and gives an immense amount of satisfaction.

In the quiet home waters *St. Kitts* is taking it easy for awhile but appearances are deceptive and at any moment now, we are expecting a mute enquiry as to what other worlds remain to be conquered.

Sadly, Derry died in 1981. My very grateful thanks go to his wife, Marion, for allowing the use of the log of *St. Kitts* and photographs of this memorable voyage, compiled by Mike Macey.

The cruise of the Zoom...

...extracted from the original log

A YEAR later, another dinghy from Bexhill made the channel crossing. This time it was a Fleetwind, a 12 foot (3.7m) dinghy built by her owner, Geoff Larkby, in his back garden the previous year. The Fleetwind is of hard chine construction in marine mahogany ply. It's registered number was F.W.41 and was named *Zoom*, after the long focus lens Geoff had been working on as a B.B.C. television engineer. He sailed with his friend, John O'Clary, another engineer and member of the B.B.C. Sailing Club.

Geoff had extensive experience of ocean racing and was a most meticulous man and so several

months' planning and preparation by the pair took place, in which charts were checked and marked and tide tables and almanacs studied.

The voyage started at 09.45 hours on Saturday, 24th June 1953 from Bexhill Sailing Club. There was a small gathering of Sailing Club members to see them off on the first leg of the trip and they were launched at half-tide by William Howes and Eric Bengé. They wore yellow exposure suits and ex-R.A.F. Mae West life jackets. Stored in the boat was an inflatable rubber dinghy. They limited themselves to 100lbs of personal gear.

The sea was smooth with little or no wind and it



**Setting off from
Bexhill Sailing Club.**

was not long before the paddles were put to use. It rained and they ghosted past Hastings. They reached Rye Harbour at 14.30 hours and, with no wind, Geoff had to haul *Zoom* in against a foul tide. They met the Customs Officer who issued them with a clearance certificate and gave them permission to proceed. Then followed a long slow sail to Dungeness where they landed at low tide at 19.15 hours on the east side about a mile from the large lighthouse. They had a well-earned meal at the 'Pilot Inn' and slept overnight at a house nearby. The day's run was 26 miles.

The next day, Sunday, 14th June, the weather was fine but with light winds and *Zoom* left Dungeness at 10.45 hours. The course was 120 degrees M. and visibility 2 – 3 miles. They cleared the shipping lanes without trouble but did not sight the South Ridge Buoy as intended and so altered course on dead reckoning. Navigation was by means of an ex-R.A.F. compass and a standard Admiralty Chart. Helmsman and crew changed places from time to time and they enjoyed a pleasant sail. Geoff described the crossing as 'uneventful'. In fact, only one thing went wrong – about mid-channel John lost his Panama hat overboard, but they did not attempt to retrieve it.

At 15.30 hours Cap Griz Nez was in sight. The plan was to sail to Ambleteuse but about an hour later, the wind shifted south and a strong adverse tide prevented them from weathering Cap Griz Nez so they tacked, stood off and decided to make for Wissant. The course was altered to 70 degrees T. The wind increased to fresh and their speed was much too high with a following sea and so they luffed up and took down the main, resuming course under jib only. The 'Q' flag was flown and landfall was made at Wissant at 18.00 hours at low tide. The Customs Officer was fetched who proved very friendly and cleared the boat with no difficulty and helped them haul *Zoom* 1/2 mile up the beach. The day's run was 31 miles at an average speed of 4.2 knots.

Geoff and John stayed in France for a few days, visiting several places around Wissant. At Calais they were able to obtain a 48-hour weather forecast from Captain Brown, Master of the cross channel steamer *Invicta* for their return trip. It read "continuing fine".

They decided not to chance their luck any further and, on Thursday, 18th June, left Wissant at 10.35 hours after hauling the boat 1/2 mile to the low-tide



John and Geoff on their return, John's panama hat has now become a French beret.

mark. Starting at low tide was necessary in order to catch a favourable tide off Cap Griz Nez. The wind was light South Westerly, the sea was calm, visibility was 25 – 30 miles enabling them to see both sides of the channel and the course set was 280 degrees M. As they left France there was a friendly greeting for them from the passengers on the Boulogne – Dover train ferry who lined the rails to wave to them as they passed. After passing over the tip of the Ridge Bank with small overfalls, the Varne lightship was abeam at 14.10 hours, distance 3 miles. They obtained a fix on Sandgate radar masts and Dungeness Lighthouse and, sailing steadily on, landed at Dungeness at 19.40 hours after a day's run of 32 miles and a time of 9 hours.

Unceasing vigilance of the Coastguard service soon became apparent to the pair when, just after they set foot ashore again, Customs men arrived from Rye to clear the ship and congratulate them on their two-way crossing.

They stayed a day on the headland and set off for Bexhill on Saturday at 08.20 hours in a S.W. wind. There was no problem launching in the lee of Dungeness but on the western side, the sea was much rougher with breaking crests. They had Rye Harbour abeam at 12.00 hours when the wind and sea went down. It was quite a long, but not unpleasant, sail back and, eventually, the keel scraped the sand off Bexhill Sailing Club at 19.40 hours having put in a round trip of 115 miles.

Sensational? "No" says Geoff – "A well-planned voyage should run smoothly providing the weather doesn't take a hand."

Across the Channel in a Firefly

by Ken Hancock

SIX years elapsed before the next attempted dinghy channel crossing. Almost since first taking up sailing, and certainly after Derry and Geoff's cruises, my eyes had been straying to the horizon. I had crewed on yachts sailing to France and the Channel Islands but to sail across the channel in a small dinghy, now that would be an adventure! When, during the winter of 1959 in conversation with Jim Agate I found that he was thinking along similar lines, it did not take long for the beginnings of a plan to start gelling.

Another incentive was that since the previous two voyages our President, Dr. Ronnie Andrews, had donated a trophy to the Club to be known as the 'President's Trophy' and was to be awarded annually to the member who submitted the best log of a cruise in a dinghy flying the Club Burgee.

Our first consideration was "what boat?" Both Jim and I owned Fireflies but a Firefly is hardly designed for cross channel cruising. We really wanted to use a 14 foot dinghy but, who was going to lend us their boat for such a venture? So a Firefly it had to be and we decided on Jim's boat *Martlet* being the newer of the two at sail number 1423.

The next decision was where to sail for. The nearest French coast to Bexhill is Boulogne, nearly 50 miles away. We thought this rather too far for a 12 foot dinghy so, by sailing from Dungeness, we

would halve the sea journey.

Next, when? From a study of weather patterns over recent years it appeared there was a good chance of a high pressure system building up around the end of May/early June. Sunday, 31st May was neap tides with high water at Dungeness at 07.15 hours. This seemed to be ideal for an early morning start. The tide should be slack when we were mid-channel so half the journey would be with the ebb and half with the flood tide.

Quite a big problem was what to take and how to stow it all away in a Firefly. After considerable thought, we devised a scheme which, in the event, worked very well. We boarded in the space between the side decks and the top of the buoyancy tanks with varnished hardboard leaving the ends open so that clothes bundled up in kit bags, tied in polythene bags, could be stuffed up behind them. I had two perspex boxes made at work which slid into spring-loaded racks under the thwarts, one on each side of the centreboard casing. These boxes when in position were really watertight and so we had no fear about stowing valuables, such as money, passports, camera, binoculars, etc. there. More clothing, etc. was tied securely in polythene bags and lodged on top of the bow buoyancy bag under the foredeck and that was that. Nothing lashed on the decks to get in the



Jim fixes the modification to the space under the side decks.

way and nothing loose sculling about in the bottom of the boat.

The boat's equipment included an anchor and line, a bucket, a small bailer, sponge, spare tiller and battens, shackles, blocks, rope, some tools and grease, knives, waterproof torch, two small boat rollers – deflated, and two inflatable cushions. (A Firefly can be a very hard seat after some hours!) We had some basic navigation equipment, charts, Red Ensign, 'Q' flag and, of course, the Club Burgee; a first aid box, bottle opener, some sweets, a bottle of rum and a thermos flask each and some sea-sickness pills.

Previous to our departure, we went over to Dungeness to have a scout around and see the lie of the land at low tide. We also booked a room for Saturday, 30th May at a private house on the beach at the spot we decided was the ideal point of departure.

We cleared things with the Customs Officer at Rye and obtained a clean bill of health for the good ship *Martlet*.

We listened to the radio weather forecasts, telephoned the Met. Office and got a forecast from R.A.F. Wartling and decided it was worth a go and so hitched up the Firefly and trailed to Dungeness.

Sunday, 31st May. The B.B.C. forecast for Dover was "variable 1-3, becoming westerly 3-4". We decided to go. We had breakfast, stowed everything on board, hoisted sail and left Dungeness at 08.20 hours. We had to paddle a bit to clear the high shingle bank and get into a light breeze which was ENE. Visibility was very poor, in fact, it was foggy. Dungeness foghorn was sounding, three blasts every 2 minutes, and this was being answered by a veritable chorus from ships passing down the channel. The shipping lane is very close to Dungeness. Checking a back bearing on Dungeness Lighthouse, we settled on a course of 150 degrees M. We passed the Trinity House Pilot vessel anchored on station about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile off on our port beam and by 09.45 hours were finally out of sight of land.

We had intended letting the coastguard know what we were up to and it was at this point in the proceedings Jim reminded me we had forgotten all about it. It was too late now, we were certainly not turning back.

The wind was still very light and gradually veering through East to South, in other words from



Modifications complete, showing the gimbal fitting for the compass.

exactly the direction we were aiming for. Add to this the fog and the fact that we were floundering about in the shipping lane and you will see conditions were not exactly ideal. At 10.10 hours, a Greek ship *Chios* passed close by and 10 minutes later the *Hamborg* followed. We were being headed badly now and so at 11.15 hours tacked onto starboard, course 70 degrees M.

Three more ships passed close by in the next hour, the *Ogstad*, *Wealdon* and *Capricornus*. Ships sail on radar and do not slow down in fog. Radar does not detect wood very well only metal and a Firefly is nearly all wood – this was before the days of G.R.P. We should, of course, have carried a metal radar reflector. I doubt whether any of the ships knew we were there at all, unless a lookout actually saw us.

High water Dungeness was 07.45 hours and the tide floods for the first four hours towards Dover. We had hoped to reach mid-channel during slack water and do the second half of the crossing with the tide flowing the opposite way. However, it was

now obvious our rate of progress was painfully slow, although just how slow we did not fully realise at the time as we were out of sight of land and only navigating on dead reckoning. To make matters worse, one member of the crew was feeling distinctly sea sick, which did not help.

Because the wind was S.E. but still veering slowly round to South and very light, we made frequent tacks to try to keep somewhere near our desired course. One aid to navigation we found most useful in the early stages of our voyage was the air ferry, Lydd to Le Touquet aircraft flying overhead. We could not see the planes only hear them but by noting their course, had a check on our own.

Then at 12.45 hours we finally broke out of the fog, the sun shone, a steady breeze sprang up and with it our spirits.

We had a period of most pleasant sailing in a gentle Force 2 and calm seas. We were sailing close-hauled on starboard tack about 90 degrees M. as the tide had turned and was flowing down channel.

Running down the middle of the channel is a narrow sandbank with a depth of only $1\frac{3}{4}$ fathoms at low water springs called the Colbart Ridge. The southern end of these shallows is marked by a whistle buoy. Our intention was to sail close by this mark (it was more or less on our course anyway) as an aid to navigation. It also marked the half-way point.

At 15.00 hours the wind fell light again and a strange object loomed up ahead with an even stranger noise coming from it. We gradually got closer and, eventually, passed a large red and white horizontally striped whistle buoy and painted on it's side was S.W. COLBART. Great rejoicing and jubilation, as we now knew exactly where we were, but this was quite soon replaced by gloom and despondency as we realised we had been sailing 7 hours and were still only half-way across. We wondered if we would reach France today or sometime tomorrow morning.

The wind now steadily increased and had veered right round to the West and, having got a definite fix at S.W. COLBART, we set course for Boulogne at 110 degrees M. allowing a bit for tide and actually whiskered the jib. At last we were sailing fast and in the right direction and it was most



One of the many
'sights' of Paris.

exhilarating after all the drifting about we had experienced. Then it became too much of a good thing, we were sailing too fast! Down came the jib pole and we set off on a broad reach spilling a bit now and then as the wind was a good Force 4 and the sea was becoming rough with the crests of the waves breaking all around us. We were anxious to reach land as soon as possible but did not want to charge along too fast as the boat was heavily laden with not a lot of freeboard and rather low in the water and there did appear to be some danger of nose-diving under unless checked.

However, all's well that ends well and we eventually sighted the high ground behind Boulogne and other land marks one by one and, passing the Boulogne Approach Buoy, occulting Red, whistle and bell, sailed into Boulogne harbour still dead on course 110 degrees M. We tied up alongside a quay and climbed stiffly out onto terra firma at 19.30 hours, 11 hours after leaving Dungeness! The channel has been swum faster than that! But never mind, we had a glowing sense of achievement.

I stayed by the boat whilst Jim disappeared in search of the Duane (Customs). Some local inhabitants wandered up to me and seemed most unbelieving when I explained that we had just crossed the channel in *Martlet*. They also said we would not find any Customs Officers interested in us and, sure enough, it was not long before Jim returned to confirm this point of view.

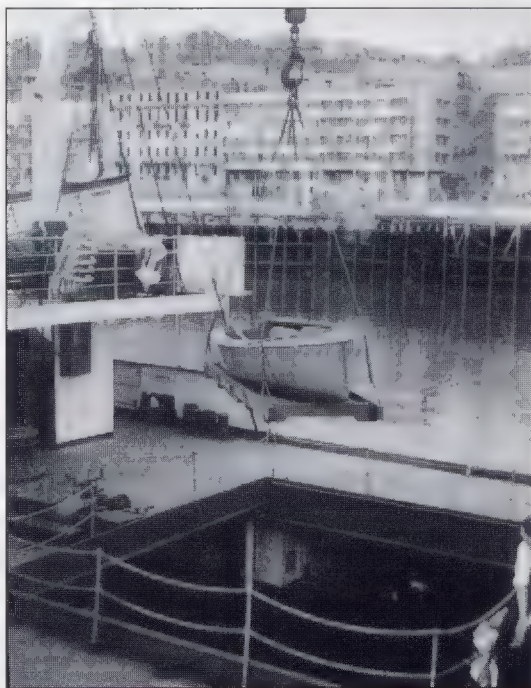
Now it appeared we had moored *Martlet* just where the cross channel steamer was due to dock in 10 minutes! As there was nowhere suitable in the harbour itself to leave a 12 foot dinghy and we did not want to leave her afloat, we hurriedly sailed out round the harbour wall to a sandy bathing beach and dragged *Marlet* well up to leave her near some bathing huts. I started unloading the boat whilst Jim went off in search of a hotel. He found one nearby, Hotel Chatham, which had only been built a year. It was very clean and our room had a super view of the harbour.

We spent the rest of the week seeing the sights of Paris, returning to Boulogne on Friday, 5th June. We checked *Martlet* and had to clean out a lot of sand which had blown into the boat. We listened to the B.B.C. weather forecast and decided to sail at midnight on a favourable tide. We transferred everything and started loading up *Martlet* but it was very, very dark and a bit on the breezy side, we got cold feet and decided to wait for daylight. It was back to the hotel for a quick spot of shut-eye. Back to the boat at 04.00 hours as dawn was breaking but it was windy and we could see plenty of 'white horses' out to sea and so again we chickened out. By 07.30 hours, the wind was really blowing strongly and so we reluctantly decided the return trip was definitely not on. We were both due back at work on Monday and so it had to be then or never. We got the boat round to the docks by borrowed trailer and loaded her into the hold of a cross channel ferry and sailed in comparative comfort to Folkestone by the 06.10 hours steamer.

We were obviously disappointed not to have done the return trip but you must respect the sea at all times and perhaps it would be appropriate here to offer advice to anyone who might be considering a similar adventure to the three just described. I would say, please think long and hard about it and make very, very thorough preparations and take all the advice you can.

It was just our luck that at that particular time, the printers were on strike and consequently no 'Bexhill Observer' could be published, which meant no publicity and fame for us!

I mentioned at the beginning of this article the President's Trophy for the best Club cruise. Since 6 years had elapsed with no applications to be considered for this trophy, the Club decided that year to re-allocate the trophy for a single-handed race and so we missed out on that too!



***Martlet* starts her return voyage!**

THERE has been one more cross channel cruise. Dr. and Mrs. Ash and their family of four boys and two girls were one of the more notorious members of the Sailing Club. In typical Ash fashion, a decision was made by two of the boys, I think it was Tim and David, to sail their Scorpion 760, *Bluenet* from Bexhill to France with no preparation at all. This was in 1968 and was just a spur of the moment decision and the details are shrouded in the mists of time. It is known that half-way across the rudder broke and they had to continue steering by paddle. It is not surprising that they kept rather quiet about this adventure and were really rather lucky to have got away with no serious mishap. Definitely not to be recommended.

List of Officers



PRESIDENTS

1947 – 1949	Charles Gulliver
1950 – 1954	Sir Charles Taylor MP
1955 – 1973	Dr R.A. Andrews
1974 – 1989	Mr F.W. Clare
1990 –	Mrs Pip Clare

VICE PRESIDENTS

1951	Capt F.C. Crosse RNR
1965 – 1981	Mrs D.B. (Tuppenny) Charles
1982 – 1986	Robin Blake
1987 –	Ken Hancock and Hugh Maynard

COMMODORES



1947 – 1951	Capt F.C. Crosse RNR
1952	Dr A.C.D. Parsons
1953	Dr R.A. Andrews
1954	Dr A.C.D. Parsons
1955	J.G.D. Shearing TD
1956 – 1958	J.B. Baber
1959 – 1960	R.E.G. Harrison
1961 – 1963	J.B. Baber
1964 – 1966	F.W. Clare
1967 – 1968	E.W. Longley
1969 – 1970	J.H. Maynard
1971 – 1972	P.G. Cole
1973 – 1974	M. Viner
1975 – 1976	Dr M.K. Robinson
1977 – 1978	J.R. Brockhurst
1979 – 1980	M.A.J. Adams
1981 – 1982	A.F.W. Alpine
1983 – 1984	R.A. Eagleton
1985 – 1986	J.E.S. Crone
1987 – 1988	J.S. Winter
1989 – 1990	D.W. Stedman
1991 – 1992	R. Dixon
1993 – 1994	R. Gadsden
1995 – 1996	Mrs Pat Goodman
1997 –	G Trimmer

VICE COMMODORES



1947 – 1952	Dr R.A. Andrews
1953	J.G.D. Shearing TD
1954	R. Rowson
1955	J.B. Baber
1956 – 1958	R.E.G. Harrison
1959	R.J. Petherbridge
1960	J.B. Baber
1961	W.J. Beer
1962 – 1965	R.E.G. Harrison
1966	E.W. Longley
1967 – 1968	J.H. Maynard
1969 – 1970	P.G. Cole
1971 – 1972	M. Viner
1973 – 1974	Dr M.K. Robinson
1975 – 1976	J.R. Brockhurst
1977 – 1978	M.A.J. Adams
1979	K.A. Hancock
1980	A.F.W. Alpine
1981 – 1982	R.A. Eagleton
1983	Miss Carol Viner
1984	J.E.S. Crone
1985 – 1986	J.S. Winter
1987 – 1988	D.W. Stedman
1989	M.A.J. Adams
1990	R. Dixon
1991 – 1992	R. Gadsden
1993 – 1994	J.W. Bournes
1995 – 1996	G. Trimmer
1997 –	Mrs Clare Day

REAR COMMODORES



1952	J.G.D. Shearing TD
1953 – 1954	J.B. Baber
1955	R.E.G. Harrison
1956 – 1959	Dr R.J. Toleman MBE
1960 – 1961	W. Howes
1962 – 1963	F.W. Clare
1964 – 1965	E.W. Longley
1966	J.H. Maynard
1967 – 1968	D.S. Murray
1969 – 1970	M. Viner
1971 – 1972	Dr M.K. Robinson

List of Officers



REAR COMMODORES *cont*

1973 – 1974	Commodore A. Henney OBE
1975 – 1978	K.A. Hancock
1979	A.F.W. Alpine
1980	G. Viner
1981 – 1982	D.W. Stedman
1983 – 1984	J.S. Winter
1985	R.A. Gammie
1986	P. Tildesley
1987 – 1988	Mrs Bea Tramaseur
1989	R. Dixon
1990	R. Gadsden
1991 – 1992	J.W. Bournes
1993 – 1994	P. Viner
1995 – 1996	R. Crozier
1997 –	W Eele

SECRETARIES

1947 – 1948	Dr P.W.L. Andrew
1949 – 1952	S.W. Duckett
1953 – 1956	Col Charles CBE
1957 – 1959	W. Howes
1960 – 1962	A.L. Roderick
1963	W. Howes
1964	C.S. Naylor
1965 – 1968	R.H. Blake
1969 – 1972	S.W. Gittins
1973 – 1976	J.H. Maynard
1977 – 1979	M. Viner
1980 – 1982	J.R. Brockhurst
1983 – 1984	E. Corke
1985 – 1987	M. Viner
1988 – 1992	J.E.S. Crone
1993 – 1995	J.H. Maynard
1996 –	Mrs Lynda Hooker

TREASURERS

1947 – 1949	Major E.G. Sherrington
1950	C.A. Petherbridge
1951 – 1953	R.N. Austin

TREASURERS *cont*

1954 – 1959	Miss H. Hyde
1960 – 1962	Miss S.P. Spurgin
1963 – 1974	Mrs Pip Clare
1975 – 1987	Mrs Anne Smith
1988 – 1992	R.A. Eagleton
1993 – 1994	D.W. Stedman
1995 –	Mrs Carol Feathers

SAILING SECRETARIES

1955 – 1956	W. Howes
1957 – 1958	R.J. Petherbridge
1959 – 1964	Miss Brenda Duckett
1965 – 1966	P.G. Cole
1967	C. Couldrick
1968	T. Furness
1969 – 1972	K.A. Hancock
1973 – 1974	G. Viner
1975 – 1977	R.E.G. Harrison
1978	D.J.T. Last
1979	J.R. Brockhurst
1980	R.A. Eagleton
1981 – 1982	G. Viner
1983	J.E.S. Crone
1984 – 1985	Mrs Pat Graham
1986 – 1989	J. Copeman
1990 – 1992	Mrs Pat Goodman
1993 – 1994	R.A. Eagleton
1995 –	R. Harrison

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARIES

1965 – 1966	D.S. Murray
1967 – 1969	G. Madeley
1971 – 1982	R.H. Blake
1983 – 1996	Miss Betty Crosse
1997 –	J. H. Maynard



HOUSE COMMITTEE SECRETARIES

1968	J. Witham
1969	Mrs J. Furness
1970 – 1971	R.W. Travis
1972	C. Stamp
1973	R.W. Travis
1974	Mrs J. Fagg
1975 – 1976	K. Cox
1977	Mrs V. McDonald
1978 – 1979	Mrs Sue Maynard
1980	D.W. Stedman
1981 – 1983	Mrs H. Winter
1984	Mrs L. Crone
1985 – 1988	Mrs R. Blann
1989	Mrs K. Cotton
1990	Mrs S. Bournes
1991	Mrs C. Day
1992	Mrs S. Bournes
1993 – 1995	Mrs L. Hooker
1996 –	Mrs A. Turpin

CADET CAPTAINS

1960 – 1962	Christopher Clare (Squadron Captain)
1963	P.J.T. Sinden (Squadron Captain)
1964	B. Moss (Squadron Captain)
1965 – 1966	K. Jerkins (Squadron Captain)
1967 – 1969	F.W. Clare (Squadron Captain)
1970	Miss J. Warren (Squadron Captain)
1971 – 1974	F. Robinson (Squadron Captain)
1975 – 1976	J. Payne
1977	J. Wakeford
1978 – 1979	J. Robinson
1980 – 1982	R.A. Eagleton
1983	J. Copeman
1984 – 1986	D.W. Stedman
1987 – 1993	M.A.J. Adams and D.W. Stedman
1994 – 1996	R. Rowsell and G. Trimmer
1996	R. Rowsell and P. White

TRUSTEES

1955	J.B. Baber Sir Sholto Douglas J.G.D. Shearing J.E. Hall
1956 – 1959	R.E.G. Harrison Sir Sholto Douglas J.E. Hall J.G.D. Shearing
1960 – 1963	J.B. Baber Sir Sholto Douglas J.E. Hall C.C. Gulliver
1964 – 1970	J.B. Baber Sir Sholto Douglas C.C. Gulliver Lt Col E. Sheehan
1971 – 1973	J.B. Baber Sir Sholto Douglas Lt Col E. Sheehan E.W. Longley
1974	J.B. Baber Lt Col E. Sheehan E.W. Longley
1975 – 1980	J.B. Baber Lt Col E. Sheehan E.W. Longley F.W. Clare
1981	J.B. Baber E.W. Longley F.W. Clare J.H. Maynard
1982 – 1989	J.B. Baber F.W. Clare J.H. Maynard K.A. Hancock
1990 –	J.B. Baber J.H. Maynard K.A. Hancock Mrs Pip Clare

So that is the first 50 years. What of the future?

Founder members, past members and present members have made the club what it is today.

Present members and future members will decide the path the club will take in the future. Bexhill Sailing Club now has a 50 year history, a very good reputation and a special place in many peoples hearts. Long may it continue.

Best Wishes from the local team at NatWest.

To the Bexhill Sailing Club, hope the 50th Anniversary celebration goes well.

From all the staff at Bexhill-on-Sea branch.

 **NatWest**

More than just a bank